

A GIANT'S CURSE

A Giant's Curse

DAKOTA FRANDSEN

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Chapter 1

Secrets of Legends

Legends. Tales of great events bound, carried and twisted through the river of time have fascinated mankind for as long as history is able to be remembered. Stories that elders would pass on to their children would fuel the imagination that is found in the arts that would come from their hands. The art then preserved in the sands of time itself only to be found eons later to rewrite the story by the standards of what new minds flourish on the Earth. Some may even try to preserve the image of what happened as if they were just taken, but none will ever know the entire truth. Like salt in the oceans, the more water that is cycled through, the less significant it becomes. That is why the stories of our ancient past have become inferior to those that managed to climb the hierarchy society has placed.

However, thanks to the final threads of seemingly forgotten arts, curiosity, and true passion, exploration of these oceans has allowed for the salt to resurface alongside other forgotten members of history to create entirely new continents.

It had seemed that all of the history's most fascinating tales ended up in these unmarked graves. The very stones that held the names eroded in time thanks to the waters in which they sank. Those with minds of youth or hollow might think the markers were simply unused and forgotten, so they treat them as such and move on. But, as few realize, the very souls of those buried inside secretly hope that someone hears the truths they whisper. There have been several times in which I myself have felt the same way, just hoping for someone with open eyes and an open heart could hear my message at least once. Then maybe, just maybe the change I had sought to bring so others may learn and to finally allow solutions, to starve the evils in our world, to come forward.

Perhaps it's too ambitious of a vision, perhaps I am a man ahead of his time who is being strangled by those whose ignorance joins hand with arrogance. Maybe my efforts will meet the same fate as other greats who tried to save the world. Unfortunately, instinct is being lifted into the higher realms of the human mind due to under stupidity with arrogance gated inside, thus not allowing for any intelligence to enter. It has become a common occurrence that made the common life of a

small town kid, well, boring. No other words needed, as it would be nothing more than a waste of time. I guess only time can read what has been written in the palms of space.

But regardless of the conditions that come into the immediate sight, what is it about these events, these people that are given praise that is said to be reserved for what is divine, what is it that makes them great? Is it a reflection of the state of the world? Or is it actually something so simple, people over think it? Or maybe it is a result of something that has existed in times before human existence? Perhaps it is a hidden desire for greatness, a struggle to appear as the dominant figure, that fuels this fight. A tiny flicker of hope that gives the neediest the idea that somehow by emulating the actions of the showcased idiotic, they too would meet a similar fate. Unfortunately, the push for dominance is not the only struggle the universe has allowed in play. The second and probably most important struggle is of variance, independence, and intelligence. Nature, no matter where in the cosmos, demands that all must be different, to be able to stand their ground, and if needed those in this struggle must be able to think of a way to take on the issue.

But with every yin there is yang and the battle between the two is what defines the stories we collect in our life, and with the right admiration, those stories become legends. It is a fate I sometimes wonder if I would be able to own with everything I had been through in

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my life. Everything I have done, all that I have fought, everyone I saved. At least the ones I managed to save.

I guess one can easily get the idea that I had something at least close to my dream life coming together, that had taken some damage over the course of its infant stages. Well, I guess it's about time I finally get down to the purpose of this book, to tell my story. But before I get to that, I supposed you would like to know a bit more about me.

My name is Dakota Frandsen, and I am a paranormal investigator. As many have stated, along with a few published thoughts on the matter, it can sometimes be hard to tell that I am involved in this type of activity. However for me, being a part of this growing phenomena, it is so much more than being a part of a group that goes around looking into rumors of spirits or other strange events.

In fact, the supernatural can be credited at times to being the only thing that has kept me alive, considering I have died four times in this life. Each time something would happen to send me back and force my soul to be Earthbound. But each time, no matter where I went, gave me an insight of the world for how it truly existed.

So, after a few "enlightening experiences," I finally put together something that some psychics claim had been brewing for nearly 400 years. In fact, it has taken so long to form, to this very day I have no clue how it all came to be. Unfortunately, we were not the only ones interested in the job. While on the front lines I

was able to discover that a society that had existed for nearly as long as my legacy, had been watching every page unfold. This truth was what ignited the very war that had preached and raved about since the Gods first landed on our world. During the struggle I was able to uncover what they have gathered on my team; our journals, photographs of our specimens, recordings of our conversations, everything they gathered on us. It was rather disturbing seeing what they had on us, but it also makes me wonder what they were planning to do with us.

I would try to talk this over with the members of my team but due to the circumstances of these last few days of battle, I was rendered one of the two remaining members. In these pages, you will find all that is left of my team so that our messages, our struggles, will not be just more salt in the oceans of time. I will be sure to do my best to channel their remaining essence so that, perhaps, you will be able to know them like I did. Perhaps those who thought they knew me, will learn something of myself they never thought was possible. But as for what is the truth and what is of the imagination, that is something you should decide.

It all began my freshman year of high school. I was just a typical kid at the time, did not have much on me but a couple dimes. My typical day usually consisted of going to class, joking around with friends at lunch, then going home. I never bothered much with dances, sports, or any other event the school hosted so they

could squeeze more money out of the students. All I ever really cared about, as far as school was concerned, was whether or not the vending machines would work. There were times few and far between where breakfast was actually something good so there were several mornings where I would grab a bag of chips, and maybe a little bottle of soda to snack on.

As for the supernatural, I had already started working a few cases by myself. Mostly looking into some of the local legends so that I could start building up a little experience, maybe even a little fame. I don't know how but somehow moonlighting as a paranormal investigator had brought a lot of global attention, to the point I started doing radio interviews. I initially didn't plan on making a name for myself this way, but if the people like it, then I might as well see how far I can run with it.

At first, I didn't spread the news about what I did go to school. I didn't want to deal with the bullshit some bunch of morons would try to stir up. I didn't mind an occasional joke but there comes a point where it just gets annoying. But to be honest I was a little afraid of what the reaction could have been if people found out, knowing that it was easy for me to find out their secrets by simply asking their dead grandpa.

But then something changed, at times it felt like I knew it was coming, but all in all, it caught me by surprise. But to be honest, I was a little surprised as to where it happened. In a class known as Touch-Stones.

Funny name I know. I am not sure how it meant reaching milestones of our lifetime, but regardless it was somewhat of a fun class. I always enjoyed classes that I could see immediate benefit from, so often times for my electives choices I would try to pick classes that would give me more insight on topics that I was involved with in my immediate personal life. But this one gave me more benefit, and teacher if you see this yes it did change my life, but not how you probably would have hoped.

Before I continue I must tell you this. My sense of time has been altered thanks to long, sleepless hours trying to stay alive and secluded long enough for me to write all I can remember. The others have decided to do the same, so they may hold details that I forget to mention in this text. Please, I urge you to try to find their work and take the time to read it as you have decided with mine. We each hold messages that need to be shared with the rest of the world or any world for that matter, so what has happened here will not happen again. You just may find that our stories begin in the oddest of places, mine being in high school.

Chapter 2

Growing High School Sweethearts

It was a typical April Friday in class. The weather outside was starting to warm up for the summer. Everyone was reading through sections of a teen self-help book we would later reenact in a group skit. I never liked group assignments, I was always the one that did the most of the work. But this one was different, people actually got to get a little crazy with it, so people would be more willing to go with it.

I was supposed to be reading, but to be honest I could only skim through the pages. Not because of boredom, because I was distracted by someone. A cute girl with jet-black hair. Yes, I guess I did start to slip into a bit of a lover's stare but to be honest I could not help but feel a sense of familiarity, almost like a dej-

vu. It felt like I had met her before, or maybe even a close family member of hers that she happened to bear a very strong resemblance to. I couldn't tell at the time, all I know is that I needed to find a way to get close to her to find out.

"Alright everyone, now that you skimmed through the pages now it is time to get into groups that I will pick for you. When I tell you your numbers you will spread out to others who have the same number and work with them to organize a skit. I will give you about ten minutes to put everything together then you will perform them all in front of the class," shouted the teacher.

Some of the class nodded in acknowledgment as the teacher began numbering off each student she passed. I watched carefully trying to predict what numbers the girl and I would receive, in hopes of it being the same.

"Dakota, you're five," she said while moving on. Great, now just to see what the cute girl gets. I watched the class to secure my prediction. It was helpful that a couple other kids held up the number they received. I watched my teacher's hand as she moved further along the lines of students like a hawk would for the unsuspecting rabbit. Finally, she reached the one I actually wanted to work with. Five. Yes.

When the teacher had finished number the heads of her students, she walked over to the middle of the classroom to start directing everyone to desks bundled together for each group. I monitored the desks desig-

nated for group number five to see who else was in my group. Jason Payne, dumb ass. Leonard Lewis, a bit of a moron. Austin Alexander, deadbeat. And Mark Jensen, a mixture of the previous three. I never got along with a lot of other guys growing up, I always thought the others were idiotic at times, wasting time on everything pointless. So seeing that I was stuck with these guys was a migraine from the start. But then again I finally had an escape plan.

When our group gathered at the bundled desks, the girl stayed away from the pack. I guess she was a little on the shy side. That was alright, I would try to ease my way in soon enough.

"Dakota, focus dude," said Jason.

"Right. Sorry. So what are we planning on doing?" I asked.

"Well we are thinking about doing a skit where two guys are driving down the highway than they get cut off by a psychopath," he said almost glaring at me.

"What?" I asked, "Are y'all wanting me to be the other driver?"

"Well you did almost hit me with your car dude," said Austin.

"Fine, I'll be the driver. So who all is playing who?" I asked to confirm.

"I am going to be the director. Jason and Austin are in the first car. You will be in the second car. I am not sure about her," Leonard said, glancing toward the lonesome one in our group.

"I will go see," I said with a slight smile.

Leonard, somehow the one that was more likable, noticed and said, "Take your time dude."

I paid no attention to what Leonard said and just walked up to the girl who had been quietly watching the class from next to the windows. The vibe I got from her earlier slowly changed as I approached her from shyness to tension. Understandable since the tallest person in the entire school was walking up to her, it would almost look like when a small child meets a friend from mommy's work for the first time. I needed to be relaxed.

"Hey," I said, "Would you like to add in something for the group?"

"No, I don't really work well with groups," she said.

There was a heating unit that was against the wall, just underneath the window that I braced myself upon to continue this conversation. "Well to be honest, neither do I," I said.

"Really? Cause you seem to do alright with them," she pointed out.

"Yeah, but I honestly couldn't care less about them," I answered.

"I see. But shouldn't you get back to them so you can find out everything for the skit?"

"No, not really. I got all of the important stuff already. Now they are just talking about some sort of game that was on last night," I said pointing towards

the group. As I said they were acting out a football game.

"Point taken," she giggled.

"Anyway my name is Dakota," I said reaching out my hand. When she acted hesitantly I simply smiled and said, "Hey you don't have to be afraid. The worst I could do to you is hug you a little too tight."

She smiled and shook my hand. "My name is Shandra," she said as she retracted her hand.

"Well Shandra, it is nice to meet you. So why don't you tell me about yourself?" I asked.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked almost confused.

"Well, to be honest, I think you are cute and I would like to get to know you better."

Shandra blushed, tucking her head into her chest so her hair would hide it. Even though I couldn't see much I could tell a couple tears started to form. "Hey is everything alright?" I asked.

She pulled her head up and began to wipe her eyes with her hand. "Yeah, sorry. It's just been a while since somebody has ever said something like that to me. Thank you," she whispered. I felt a little relieved.

"You're welcome," I said.

"But you don't want to hear about me, I am not all that special," she tried saying.

"Oh I think you're wrong about that," I answered.

"How would you know?"

"I can feel it. I can feel that you are somebody that has dealt with a lot in her lifetime. I can feel that you are searching for something, causing you to go day in and day out trying to put together some sort of understanding of the world in order to find whatever it is. I can also feel that you are looking for somebody to help you understand it."

I looked into Shandra's eyes to be able to see if I was breaking down the fortress inside her. You can always tell when a wall around the soul has broken when you begin to see something like the auroras start to dance a bit more freely. And inside her deep green eyes, I was able to see just a tiny glimmer. My hammer had started to break through, but still had much more work to do.

There was a slight quiver in her lips as she asked, "Really?"

"Of course," I answered, "These days it is something rare, and in several ways, quite beautiful. Especially in a place like this where everybody obsesses over the most worthless parts of life."

Shandra turned a brighter shade of red and let out a slight giggle. "It seems like everybody in the world is the same way," she said, "...then the ones that know how it really is get tossed aside and get treated like trash."

"Tell me about it."

As she said that I began to see a change in her eyes. She became almost frozen with a look on her face that I was all too familiar with, one of great internal pain. A

girl like her shouldn't have that look at any point of her life. She was so kind, yet she was the type that went ignored until something happened to take her away. I tried to place my hand on her shoulder to get her out of that state but as it made contact I began to receive a vision. Shandra was surrounded in darkness, curled up as she would if hiding in a corner. Tears flowed down her face soaking her red t-shirt. My vision slowly eased to her side, where I began to hear her choke on her tears as she tried to whisper the words, "Somebody please help me."

When I manage to receive these types of visions, it usually means that the other person has opened up to me. They were willing to let me help them. But I needed to test the connection. I know I am making it sound like something you would do when setting up wireless internet on a computer, but psychic phenomena actually work in very similar ways. If this were a computer I would test out the connection by going to a video website and try to watch the first video that came up. But this was a living person I was dealing with, so I needed to find a way to get a message across. So I tried a vision trick said to be used by the deceased so they could speak with loved ones when their minds are in the right state. And Shandra was under the right conditions to make it possible.

What I did was allow for a copy of my soul to move through my arm and make it through to her mind. This would allow for me to scan what brain frequency she

was on and allow myself to match it. By doing this I inevitably trick the brain into thinking I am a part of Shandra's vision. Once I made it in I slowly walked toward Shandra and sat next to her. "Somebody please help me," she cried again.

I placed my arm around her and whispered, "I will." She laid her head on my shoulder than the vision faded. We were back in class.

Shandra looked at me and asked, "How did you do that?" I wasn't sure how to explain it to her at the time other than simply saying that it was how I knew she was special. Before she could respond, our teacher approached us.

"Are you two working with your group?" my teacher asked.

"Yeah, we got everything taken care of, Ms. Jacobs," I answered.

"Really? Then what are you guys doing for the skit?" Ms. Jacobs questioned.

Leonard interrupted, "We are doing a skit where two guys that are driving off the highway get cut off by a crazy driver that only ends up crashing."

"Really?" my teacher looks at me, "So then Dakota what are you playing?"

"I am the crazy driver," I answered.

She then looked at Shandra, "and you are playing as?"

"I am a bystander to the crash," Shandra replied.

"Alright," she turned away to the rest of the class, "You all have a couple more minutes until we start the re-enactments."

I looked to Shandra with a slight grin. "See? Everything I needed to know," I joked.

Shandra face turned to a more serious scowl and asked, "Is everyone around here that judgmental?" I tried to keep the peace, but I understood that Shandra may have been through something that triggered these emotions when the teacher came up.

So all I could really do was be honest. "Just about," I answered, "But keep your eyes open, you will find the few good ones laying around."

"I hope you're right. Back at my old school nobody was kind."

Finally, she started answering me about her background. "Oh really? What happened?" I asked.

"I don't know, I wasn't really liked by a lot of people back at my old school and everyone would just keep harassing me about it. It seemed to be the same way at every school I would go to."

"I know how you feel. It's pathetic how people treat one another these days."

"Exactly! You never know what people might do for you in the long run that might help you out."

"I'm glad to finally meet someone else that sees that."

"Well you know the saying, 'The most knowledgeable are the most neglected in masses of the idiotic', it seems to become truer every day."

"I have never heard it put quite like that before, yet it pretty much covers it all. I'm impressed."

"Thanks."

In her eyes I noticed a few more bricks crumbling away as the aurora began to grow. She was starting to warm up to me. That was good, and it honestly it felt good knowing that I was the reason for the smile on her face. "Alright everyone back to your seats we need to get started on the skits," shouted the teacher. Damn it. Just as things started to get interesting.

Leonard, Jason, Mark, and Austin all raised their hand, volunteering our group to begin. I guess I might still be able to squeeze in a little more time with Shandra. "I guess it's showtime," I said to her.

Shandra took a deep breath and said, "I guess so."

I started to walk to my desk when Shandra hugged me from behind. She whispered a "thank you" then shrunk into her desk. I hurried over to my seat three rows over, which only took me about three steps in order to accomplish. Being tall had its advantages, this was one of them.

Right as I sat down Ms. Jacobs had looked me in the eye and immediately asked, "Dakota! Who all is in your group?" I jumped.

"Shandra, Austin, Leonard, Jason, Mark and myself," I answered.

"Do you have your skit ready?" she asked.

"Heck yeah!" Mark interrupted.

"Then get up there," she said trying to rush us.

I could sense a bit of tension in my teacher's voice that appeared directed to me. Which I found confusing considering I was one of the better-behaved ones in the class. I wonder what was going on to make her try to drop a nuke on me when I suddenly get a slight spring in my step. That was just not professional.

Maybe I can ease tensions with this skit. No not with the teacher, because her problem may have been with other students, I was just an unfortunate recipient. I needed to ease tensions with Shandra. I know that I said I was getting her to warm up to me but kind words can only chisel the cement blocks. There is something however, that can easily warm up anybody no matter what situation they were in. Comedy.

Ever notice how after a rough day, watching a good comedy special makes you feel like the world spun in your favor? Or how when reminiscing about a deceased loved one, a memory of a prank they pulled brightens everyone up? How no matter how bad things got somehow they always ended up getting better after something simply funny just happens? Weird how that works right? Well, it is only proof of the old saying, "Laughter is the best medicine." But it is a medicine that needs to be taken during certain windows of time. Since Shandra had let out slight giggles while we were talking, I knew that the time is right.

The other guys in the group readied our “set” towards the front of the classroom. Mark took an office chair and placed it towards the far right of the room facing left. In its line of sight was a desk positioned the same as the chair. Both were used in place of the cars for the skit. In place of a concrete barrier on the side of the road, there was a couple desks pulled forward away from the rest. Mark and Austin sat in the desk car together, which looked uncomfortable considering it was a single seater. But since they both were smaller guys it somehow worked out. I sat in the office chair and readied myself for the appropriate moment. Leonard and Shandra positioned themselves amongst the remainder. Shandra posed like a pedestrian on the side of the road. Leonard sat front and center on top of the desk. He crossed his legs and pretended to be smoking a cigarette, getting himself ready to start it all. And with a fake, stereotypical French accent he shouted, “Action!”

Mark pretended to be holding on to steering wheel while Austin acted like to be observing local scenery. “Wow this is sure a nice day,” Mark stated.

“I know right, I sure do hope that something bad doesn’t to wreck it,” Austin replied.

While they were talking an idea came to me that would enhance how this skit would play out with the audience. Something that would make the scene more realistic. So I started beat boxing to the first song that came to my mind and flailed my left arm to look like I was rocking out. At first, I kept the noises quite, to

mimic the effects of distance, but would quickly get louder. After a couple seconds, I forced the chair to move towards the desk.

Mimicking the sound of tire screeching, I spun the chair around the desk, flipped the other car the bird, then continued driving forward. From behind me, I could hear, "Watch where you're driving jerk," and "Look out." I did not pay attention, cause the moment put me under a minor adrenal high, I needed to keep going. So looking toward the barricade, I screamed then ran into it, forcing my body to fly over it.

The class burst out in laughter. From the ground, I looked up at Shandra and noticed that she was a bright red color from laughing so hard. I don't know why but I became somewhat addicted to making people turn to the cheerful red color. Anytime I would see it, especially knowing that I was the reason for it, I would feel a moment of peace. Like that somehow confirmed that I was not going to be the devil some seek for me to be. I will admit I do have a short temper, but I am nowhere near the monster some try to say that I am. I guess that is why Shandra took to me so well, knowing that the world tries to turn us both into monsters.

But for now, none of us cared, we were just enjoying the moment. "Dakota are you alright?" asked Ms. Jacobs after her laughter had calmed.

I slowly stood, slightly dizzy. "Yeah, I'm fine, just uh got a little carried away with the scene, that is all," I answered.

"Well no kidding dude, you weren't supposed to do that!" said Mark. By this time everyone was standing slowly trying to hold back laughter.

"You know what, it made it better didn't it?" I replied.

"You guys do have to admit what Dakota did made your skit funnier. A's for all of you," said Ms. Jacobs.

"Well, there you go!" I said.

Everyone returned to their seats with faces still with smiles from what they had just seen. But honestly, I did not care about them right now. I only cared about one person in that room right now, it was the time I asked how she liked the show. I took a detour through her row of desks to stop and kneel next to her.

"Did you enjoy the show?" I asked with a smirk. She nodded her head while trying to hold back her laughter. I simply nodded and replied, "Awesome."

As I walked over to my desk the next group began to set up a stage. I don't really remember what the other groups did for their skits and honestly, I didn't care. I had other plans the began to fill my mind, plans for another one of my specialties. Tonight was my first official case underneath the name of the Paranormal Raider Force.

Chapter 3

Unseen Allies, Forgotten Nightmares

Time almost stood still when I met Shandra, not completely though, but enough to quiet things down to make it feel as if we were the only two people left in the world. Be it post apocalyptic or plague, or even last two survivors of a natural disaster staring into the eyes of the fallen, I didn't care, it just felt good to have someone in the same boat that I genuinely enjoyed.

There isn't a day I can't remember that I haven't played through at least twenty different scenarios where things could turn interesting at any moment. Having to plow through riots after the President declared martial law, taking down a gunman, getting into a car wreck to try to save somebody who was kidnapped, there wasn't a thing I didn't take into consideration. Of-

ten times I would use that ability to predict possible outcomes of situations I was put into so that in the end I would turn out the hero for at least pointing people in the right direction.

But for what was about to happen that night, I ran through scenarios based on what I knew about what I was hunting. The case was personal for me; the client, the location, the spirits I was looking for, everything. My grandfather had asked me to look into some strange events that took place at a highway department building he managed. When he had first asked me to do it, I didn't go through with it because I was lacking some equipment. I had all of the basics down. However, the infrared LED's on my cameras didn't reach very far so it impaired the investigation a lot.

But things had been going well for the last few weeks, so that night I was a bit more confident. In order to do this case, I needed a place nearby the scene so I could be close in case something went south after it was all said and done. I was fortunate because my grandparents said I could stay the weekend to work on the case. So I took them up on that offer.

The bell just rang to release everybody to go home. I had the unfortunate displeasure of not seeing Shandra to the end since we both had different classes to go to for the eighth period, which was right after Touch-Stones. My class was only a few steps away, while Shandra's was in the gym a few halls away.

Even if we were released at the same time, it would still take her a few minutes to dress down, which was plenty time for me to make it about a quarter of the way home. I sometimes wonder if I should have waited, but I didn't want her believing that I was a stalker. Regardless of what would have happened that day, it was not my main focus. My main focus was getting to my house in order to pack my gear for that night's hunt.

I noticed something as I was walking home that day, something that was out of the ordinary. When I crossed the street while walking from the campus of the school, a large black SUV slowly drove next to me. I kept my pace, occasionally stopping so that I could force a peek inside the vehicle to see who was driving. Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted at least three men. They were dressed in tuxedo-like suits, sunglasses, and black fedora hats. One that sat on the passenger side had been watching my every move since they pulled up. Something was not right.

A shot of adrenaline started to course through my veins, forcing me to pick up the pace. The vehicle followed suit. As we moved the passenger of the vehicle had rolled down the window exposing his face. I tried to map the details of everybody in the car out of the corner of my eye to the best of my ability. It felt like I was staring at clones for how similar they all appeared. Average height and weight, pale white skin, heads shaven down to the skin, and no details of aging. One detail that I found disturbing was that instead

of lips, there was nothing more than a tiny slit for a mouth. Something was just not right.

I kept increasing my pace until I could see an empty alleyway I could detour into to try to stir them away or fight if needed. Once by the alley I turned and walked forward not giving a care to what was in front of me.

“Shit,” I whispered.

It was a dead end. I stopped in my tracks to look for a door or for some way I could escape. Nothing would spin in my favor.

“Mr. Frandsen. We need to talk,” I could hear from behind me. I turned to face the men in suits.

When I turned all three were getting out of the vehicle. Giving me a glimpse of the license plate.

“Nevada M18I36B23,” I whispered while taking a mental note. The driver had positioned himself front and center while the other two walked shoulder to shoulder forming a triangle if viewed from above. All three removed their glasses. Their eyes were awfully huge.

“You are Dakota Frandsen, right?” one asked.

“Yes,” I replied, “What is this about?”

“We just needed to see something.”

“Okay. What?”

The front one looked to both of his partners, each nodding their head as if to confirm something to the other, before facing me again. They reached into their waists revealing a silver glare, that had blinded me for

only a few moments. When my eyes returned to normal I froze, I was at gunpoint. They fired.

"DADDY!" screamed a familiar voice.

My heart was racing. I used my arms to cover my eyes when I began to see bright white lights carrying me away. I thought I was dead, and this was my ascension into heaven. The sound began to return to my ears. I could hear the creaks and moans of an old house, the bubbles surfacing in a fish tank, and the low whispers of the radio. I was not in heaven. I was in my house, at least a mile away from school.

"What the fuck just happened?" I shouted.

No one was going to be able to answer me. I lived alone. In some ways I preferred it; the only bullshit, drama, or interruptions I ever get is from the television. I hardly ever had visitors that made it past the front door, the only ones that ever did were often repair guys.

However, living alone did add on to what just happened. I don't have a daughter, I don't have any kids. I was only fifteen, living by myself, and making it day by day off of a check I received from helping a few projects here and there. Getting a date was never a problem for me, but I never really dated a lot, and most of those relationships never got to the point where children could come up.

So who in the hell was calling me daddy? I sure would like to know so I could at least thank them. I need to think about this, but the timing could not be worse, I also needed to know who the hell just tried

to kill me. Luckily I built a system online just for this type of occasion. And there was a desktop system in the front room with perfect Internet capabilities.

It was called the Akashia, named after the legendary Akashic records. It was an online service I personally designed, that allowed paranormal investigators to research any phenomena documented. One may think it would be a difficult task to put together, luckily my group had international influence so we had quite a few people from all over the world that helped put it together and even help with translation.

I built this system a lot like the medical websites that are online. Users could go in and just type out things that they have witnessed and it would give them details about what it could have been. Right now it was the best resource I had at my disposal.

“Alright let's see what we have here,” I whispered. Sorry I have a habit of talking to myself.

The first item of business, the suits. “Black suit, black vehicle, slit for a lip, large eyes, intimidating. Let's see if that brings up anything.” Loading. One result found. “Perfect.”

The search criteria brought up information from several extraterrestrial cases involving mysterious men in black suits forcing UFO witnesses to stay quiet about something they had witnessed. They didn't intervene for every claim though, which makes things more interesting. When they would appear everything they owned was brand new. No wrinkles on their skin

or clothing, no signs of dust cover; everything looked magazine good.

There was something though that interests me, the alleged cause of this phenomena. The suits began appearing shortly after the UFO crash in Roswell, New Mexico. This fact is what causes many to believe they are part of a secret Air Force group that is made entirely of genetically altered units. This does make sense given their appearance. Several alien species had just a tiny slit in place of their mouth and the large eyes could have been contributed by DNA of a nocturnal species. I can think of a few that would match the description, and unfortunately, most of them were not afraid to kill.

Alright, so now there is a who, but why. Why in the hell did they try to shoot me? Wait, something kept that from happening. Was it my daughter?

"Young female voice. Bright lights, changing locations, intervenes to prevent loss of life." Something feels a little familiar about the voice. I heard it before; it was a voice of a little girl. Loading. "Four results."

Alright, it sounds promising. The first listing was about incidents of divine intervention. Accounts where the divine and sometimes the unholy intervene in the situation.

Both heaven and hell have had agents intervene in various cases. In most cases, angels were trying to get somebody out of a deadly situation and demons came to rip apart those guilty of the most severe crimes. The bright lights I saw usually mean angels intervened. To

be honest, I am not a very religious person but I took the bright lights as I sign that some higher power still saw me as a good person.

But what was strange is that when angels intervene they usually escort who they were trying to save to an area just outside the blast zone, or even allow for the people they are trying to help to fly with them. There have been very few times where it was just a circle of bright white lights, and those happen on one of two occasions. In our final moments of our current life, we will see the bright white lights when the last loved one who has died comes back to help you make the transition. Sometimes even the family dog comes to help. The second time is often a manifestation of something people visualize when the phenomenon known as "bi-location" took place.

With a typical understanding of the English language, it is easy to tell what bi-location is all about literally being in two places at once. This phenomenon is observed typically under the conditions of out-of-body experiences, through forms of meditation, and according to some cultures (and some personal accounts according to the Akashia database) through dreaming. One of the most notorious accounts of this was during the second World War when a priest was spotted hovering over a German town in a veil of white light and somehow caused Allied bomber planes to malfunction. This all happened after the priest had made a promise to protect the town.

Here was the issue, how is it that a single man was spotted hovering at the same level as a plane, and was also seen in his regular meditations inside the church at the same time? And now that I think about it, there was another source of light that caused problems for Allied planes in the war. They were known as Foo Fighters (Foo translates to fire). These lights did not originate from any craft because several planes actually flew right through them causing the engines to fail and the planes to crash land. Many people try claiming that these were just hallucinations caused by low oxygen levels and war tensions, but this phenomenon has actually been photographed. While this all looks similar to what had just happened to me, this doesn't explain it.

The next page responds to the "young female voice" part of my search. It is all about the ghost children phenomena. Some of you may think that "maybe it's a normal ghost." Well in some cases it is, but there are also times where children who died while still inside the mother come running around. Sometimes even if the baby is alive and well while still inside the mother, the child comes out in a spirit form to meet mommy and daddy beforehand. What I have always found creepy in these situations is that even though the child may not be fully developed, when they made an early appearance like that, they always looked like they are about the age of six.

That is about how old the girl's voice sounded, a youthful high-pitched ring. But the closest I had to a miscarried child was a couple siblings who had died before birth. Then I notice something familiar attached to the listing under "Personal Experiences." This was where users could write about their own supernatural experiences and the system would automatically link it to listings that explained the phenomena so other experiencing it could get more personalized advice. It was about ninety percent accurate, so to fill in the other ten percent I would allow other users to post links themselves to phenomena they believe could be going on.

I clicked on the link to read into the situation. I watched it pull up a story that was written by myself a couple months ago when I set this up. As I read through it memories started to come back to me, memories about where I first heard that voice. The memory of how I met my daughter. The story read like this:

"I am not exactly sure if the links I have added to this story are accurate, but based on my personal knowledge I felt that these were the closest to what was happening. I ask for those of you who read this to not judge my actions, for now, I know much better and live a pretty good life. But I need for you to read this and to understand my situation so that more people can be aware that somebody very close to them is capable of what I have almost done. So here goes.

"When I was thirteen years old, I tried to commit suicide. I was the target for bullies at school and at home, and the harassment would get too far some days. I just wanted it to stop but no one would listen to me, and back then I wasn't aware of the resources out there to help people in these types of situations. I wanted to get away from all of it and I also wanted to leave a mark on the people who would refuse to help me.

"To do it I decided to choke myself with one of my belts. So one night as I was supposed to head to bed I went into my bedroom closet and set everything up. It was a rather large closet with enough room to stash a queen size bed, which I thought it was the perfect place to do it since it would also be the last place anyone would ever look in order to find me. I tied one end of my belt to a coat railing inside the closet and let the other end, fastened in a loop, dangle. The support that would hold me up was a little metal chair that I would kick away when I was ready and when the set-up was ready I positioned myself to get it over with.

"But before I could kick away what held up my whole body froze, I couldn't move at all. I tried to fight it but it was no use. Then a bright blue light came out of nowhere and surrounded me. I was stunned. After a few seconds, I could see a blurry image of a man with long hair and wearing a white robe. The man said, 'Dakota there is someone here to see you,' as the silhouette of a young girl started walking towards me. As

she got closer I could make out more details, she was an absolutely beautiful child. She walked up to my face, I now could see tears coming out of her eye. Then she placed her hand on my cheek and whispered, 'Daddy please don't do it.' She kissed me on the cheek then her, the man, and the blue light disappeared. I was able to move again.

"Something about seeing that little girl managed to get me to snap out of it. The only thought that ran through my head was, 'What the hell was I doing?' I couldn't go through with my plans because of the connection I felt to the little girl. And to be honest I would like to find a way to see her again to learn more about her.

"Signed Dakota Frandsen. Founder of the Paranormal Raider Force, Creator of The Akashia."

Below the story, I could see that a few people replied. The first one looked the longest and appears to have some insight.

"Thank you, Dakota, for sharing this. It is very interesting and I am glad it got you out of that dark place. You still have a future in this world. I hope you don't mind but I may have some information that could be of use to you if you are serious about trying to find the little girl. I am a psychic medium in Boston and I am getting this information from my spiritual guides that are asking me to help you."

My first thought that this could have been something good. A psychic medium would be useful, to help

understand this, if he was legitimate. I never directly assume that someone claiming that they possess any sort of psychic ability until they pass my test. It usually adjusts to match each claim. The rest of the post will give me an idea of what needs to be put up for the examination to see if this psychic was able to live up to his name.

"The young girl that stopped you from harming yourself is in fact related to you. But she has not been able to be born. You were granted a vision of her so that you would have enough motivation to stick around. She will not be around you all the time but you will be able to see her again when you are on the right path. I feel that when you meet the right person and get to the right places at the right time she will appear again. Stick with the path that may seem narrow but will bear many fruits, and eventually, you will be able to see the child where you will be able to learn more about her and when she will come into your life.

"Feel free to listen in on my show that airs every Tuesday online. I might be able to help you more with your journey on air if you would like. Feel free to send it in as an email."

I honestly felt relieved at the news. I could not help but feel good about the situation though, obviously, I must have been a good father if my daughter worried about me before she is even born. But she doesn't need to do that. She is my daughter, when she is born I am supposed to be the one protecting her. Wait a minute.

A flashback came to me from that night. The blue lights, the little girl walking up to me, I remember every detail. Then the flashback freezes the moment she touches my face, thus allowing for me to see her own face much clearer, clearer than I could remember. She looked beautiful, but the sight of her like this breaks my heart, yet burns itself into my mind. The flashback quickly disappeared, returning my mindset to its usual state.

It took me a minute to process what had just happened, but then it dawned on me. The mother of my child was near. But I needed to see how close I was on my guess. I needed to find the right picture.

Luckily, social media has become a good resource for finding people under the condition that they had a profile and you knew how to spell their name. I tried to pull up the first person that came to mind and typed in her name, then I realized I didn't know her last name. Shit. Then again there was an easy outlet to retrieve that information from, school.

But honestly, the only name I needed to know at the moment was the name of my little girl.

"Remember to take the narrow path for it will bear many fruits," whispered a voice. This voice had talked to me before on a couple occasions, even saved me from being killed a couple times. I always thought that it sounded like an older woman, kind of a grandmother-type. When she would start to talk I would listen, cause

it always seemed that she held unimaginable insight to every situation so far.

But there was a side effect that always took place when we would cross paths, drowsiness. I didn't mind though. I rather enjoy sleep. And sometimes when I slept my visions and my dreams would intertwine, giving a more poetic prophecy at times. So I shut down the computer, locked the front door, then fell asleep at about 4 o'clock. Which was good because I needed to be awake for the case.

I woke up about two hours later, enough time for me to get ready and cook myself dinner before I left. But before I could anything I checked my dream journal to see if anything significant came up. Somehow I managed to train my subconscious to write down dreams that peaked my interest. Sometimes these would be prophetic, other times they would play out like either action movie or romantic comedies with a little extra "romance". It was left on a page with fresh writing, as the smell of the ink was still relatively strong.

"I remember standing in a valley full of cherry blossoms, dressed in my uniform. I looked around admiring the scenery, a truly magnificent sight. From a few distant trees, I could see three silhouettes dancing around and playing. One was a large man, one a small girl, and the other a curvy woman of roughly average height. The sound was harmony; the tiny shreds I could hear brought me peace. I needed to get closer. I walked over to an opening just in front of the playing trio and

every step I took my uniform changed color, eventually becoming an angelic white. To my sides, two people appeared. Both looked familiar but their faces were blurred. The first had the figure of a goddess that I was drawn to, like a lover long isolated from the heart. I could hear the sound of crying coming from her. I kneeled to try to give her a shoulder, but before I could she disappeared in a golden light. The other person, a young girl no older than six made herself more visible. It was my daughter. She walked in front of me and leaned into my ear to whisper that her name was Olivia. She gave me a kiss on the lips then disappeared in a swirl of bright white lights.

"When they both had disappeared I stood to see the silhouettes had made changed revealing their identities. The man and the young girl were actually a father and daughter. The woman had appeared more clearly, along with rest but her face was still blurred, she must have been the mother. They all were a happy family; walking, playing, all while simply just loving one another. I watched as they moved, it was all genuine. Then all three looked at me and smiled before disappearing. In their place was two more of myself each dressed differently. One is a regular leather jacket, t-shirt, and jeans outfit and the other in my black uniform I wore while on a paranormal job. The look on their faces appeared serious, like brothers uniting to take down somebody who had harmed one of their own. They were ready for battle.

"They approached, eventually placing their arms in to signify unity, each was to place one hand in. When all three were in, our hands turned to fists, igniting energy that took us over. It consumed us, yet it did not harm us, and together we spun like an engine that ran off the powers of the universe. Everything moved so fast, the ground under us was set on fire that launched us into the sky. From the heavens, the three of us combined into one. I could see fires that formed the symbol for my team, the Paranormal Raider Force, that grew in size as I flew. When I had flown far enough a strong wind terminated the fires and ripped apart the trees. But it was no wind. It was an explosion unlike any other."

See what I mean? Sometimes it gets to be very difficult to translate them when they take place at so many different levels. So for this, I would allow the psychic medium from earlier take a gander at it sometime later. But just for future reference, I jotted down the date underneath the dream. It came in handy later on.

Yet after the excitement of the dream, I could not help but still feel tired. Messed up right? Practically just flew away from an explosion and I still felt sleepy. Sheesh, I thought those types of dreams were supposed to wake you up. But luckily food is a good measure to wake one's self. That night I was thinking of grilling up some bacon ranch cheeseburgers. Not exactly ideal for an all-nighter, but the combination of a meaty meal and the adrenal rush of a fruitful job

is enough to keep a large man such as me at ease, yet ready for the next move. At least until the end of November came around and turkeys would all hide in hopes of surviving another Thanksgiving.

The sound of the boiling water boiling the raw patties was awful relaxing that night. Water sheltering cold meat like survivors of an avalanche. I could never find out why but when I cooked (yes ladies I am a guy who can cook), I always found it somewhat relaxing. That is why I could never go professional with it, when a rush would come up it would take the joy out of it. So I always preferred cooking for small groups, usually for a maximum of five people. Any more than that, the quality of my work would quickly diminish.

Figures that one of the only "normal" looking parts of my life was sitting down in front of the television and eating dinner. I might as well have at least one moment like this; when it wasn't so hard to conform to the illusion of reality. It is because of this I sometimes feel like a serial killer; looking for work, not feeling anything, seeming abnormal to others. Yeah, that feels about right.

But the case that night marked the end of that. It was a chance to finally get to live what is real. A chance to finally feel alive. It was the night I would begin to break every chain to society's accepted reality. And it felt great, almost like a little kid's first visit to an amusement park. So many new experiences, so many new things to try, so many places to go, in so little time.

But I had approximately six hours to stir up something in that old building.

And it was a clear night in which I held a very good feeling that somebody was going to be ready to play. It was officially my first hunt, somebody was going to take advantage of the nervous energy coming from me. Thankfully food settles nerves otherwise I wouldn't be able to think straight.

After dinner, I cleaned up the dishes and walked into my office to gather my things for the investigation. When I managed to buy this place, it was a two story, two bedrooms, one bath house. Since I was the only one here, I took the smaller room and converted it into an office. School work, movie production, evidence review, script writing, just about anything that was accessed on the computer was done exclusively here. The computer downstairs, that was used mostly for gaming and checking emails when I felt lazy after school.

I also had a mini-fridge and a table almost covered in forensics supplies in my office. The forensics materials were used when I would examine evidence collected from the more human side of my investigation when the causes of the activity showed relations to criminal activity. Using tricks I had learned from my buddies in the local crime lab, I would use these materials when something other than weird photos emerged. It slowly became a part of my craft.

But that night was just a routine ghost operation, the table was going to have to wait. So utilizing what

room I had available I began to gather my gear that had been stored away in the closet and readied my bags.

Since I was running a solo-operation at the time and my income had room for occasional night outs or new gadgets, I didn't have a lot of the gear you would find on television. What I did have was mostly acquired through Christmases and birthday parties. Pistol-grip thermometers, wireless alarms, digital camera, digital night-shot camera, electromagnetic field detectors, voice recorders, and a closed circuit television DVR system with four infrared bullet cameras is what my equipment comprised of in the beginning. Enough for a private operation but not enough to cover all of the bells and whistles showed on television.

Regardless of what people think the paranormal as it stands now is not an exact science. It just has a few tricks up its sleeve. I bet in a few years mainstream science will be able to prepare some new gadgets that will back up what spirituality has been trying to say for as long as civilizations have existed. In fact, I heard that is already happening, so I cannot ignore any side of the argument entirely.

My process for an investigation was flexible but yet it held a general picture. I go in, I walk around listening to each story of the spooks, then adjust my movements to mimic the spirits inside. The flexibility usually sprung from what movements I needed to make, thanks to my access to forensics materials. If any client acted like they have been using drugs, I have the

know-how and gear to test for it and forward the results to my buddies at crime lab if the portable tests I used turned up positive. The same went for the times when I came signs of abuse, cause when spirits try to intervene, it usually was a sign that it was approaching a life or death situation.

Luckily tonight I did not have to worry about any of that. The only thing I had to worry about was the smell of cigarettes making my sinuses blow up like a hot air balloon. That and my grandfather had been on chemotherapy drugs for his battle with cancer, but they never caused any hallucinations. Anything he saw I could easily back up. So during the midnight hours, it was going to be a clean case.

However, this one was also a bit emotional for me. My grandfather wanted to come along on this hunt, but his condition made him too tired. I understood that he was going through a lot, but the thought that he would be able to help me make the first steps made the process more exciting. I know I said that I preferred to start off my craft with a bit of alone time but I had a father-son kind of relationship with my grandpa.

There were several points in my life where he was the only person in my family that respected the fact that I was not like other kids. I did not enjoy sports, I didn't enjoy hunting or fishing, but that I had enjoyed other things and he was the only one who seemed glad that I found out what they were.

So when I grabbed a thermometer that he had given me, I could not help but whispered, "This is for you, grandpa."

When I finally had most of my gear packed up I had realized I almost forgotten to suit up. This is where it all looked bad ass. On the far end of my closet, there was my uniform; a long black leather trench coat, custom t-shirt with my logo positioned on the front, black pants, dress shoes with wooden insoles, and a black jungle fedora hat. The idea for it came to me from a visit from a mysterious shadow figure that would appear to people around the ages of thirteen and seventeen, that would often be recognized as a man wearing a fedora and a long trench coat. I wanted to see if by somehow cloaking myself as the figure, it would somehow bring out more spirits from hiding. But, I made a slight modification to it to give a more scary look to it, the eyes.

For the eyes, I would use special contact lenses that change my eye color, coated with a special residue that adjusted visible light into much lower frequencies where spirits are rumored to exist. It was a crazy idea sprouted from failed military experiments, but I made a few adjustments that would reduce any risk of failure. And through all of the eye burning and the time I had put into it, I had the perfect mix.

But I needed to be careful about timing, in the daylight hours the light is too intense and would complicate anything that needed to be done within the next 48 hours because my eyesight would have taken dam-

aged that took that time to correct itself. The appropriate time to put them in was right after the sun had set all the way, which based on the clock on my phone was about an hour and fifteen minutes away. Plenty of time.

I quickly changed out of my normal street clothes and into my uniform. In moments I was no longer Dakota Frandsen, for my Shadow Hunter had taken over. A pseudonym for the feelings, or near addiction, that take over when I was needed. Be it a ghost hunt, a monster hunt, a search for aliens, or finding the criminal in the masses, my Shadow Hunter knew what to do and when to find them. Let's just say I have yet to lose a single soul thanks to him and his allies. Everyone I went after and everyone I would help would always get what was needed in the end. So now it was time to get my grandfather what he needed, answers. I needed to get my gear in my car.

My car was parked outside of my front door about 10 feet away sitting in the driveway. It usually took about two steps for me to get from the driver's side door to the front door, but with a large haul, I was more careful. I needed to, knowing that people's houses were being broken into on an almost daily basis. They tried to get into my house on a few occasions, but it stopped once I grabbed the guy and nearly broke off his hand so I could get the police some evidence on him. He tried to sue me for assault, but luckily the judge had personally known me and dropped the case.

But even though the guy was caught, I was always careful just in case some other idiot tried to complete the job. So like most people should do, I locked up my doors before I left. My gear was outside with me, always in my sight, so I could watch for people. My keys reflected the light onto the silver letters on each one of my bags, making the acronym for my group appear as it was dancing as I loaded up my trunk.

But as I loaded up the car, something began to weaken my insides. Sometimes when I am getting tuned in to a spiritual channel, a pressure began to build in my chest. I have felt this sensation a few times before, each time my soul would exit my body. When this would happen something intense would have happened. But I was only loading up my car, so what could have been going on?

I remember feeling this pressure slowly push itself out of my body, then within nanoseconds, I was able to move freely across space through a psychic ability known as Astral Projection. This would allow me to have eyes and ears in another place. But when I would enter this state I had a hard time controlling my movement, much like if I was in a dream, so it would move itself to what spot it felt was important.

Everything moved so fast, but yet it did not go far. My projection stopped and peered at my front door where I could see six spirits just standing there. At first, it was all a blur but once it settled into a single shot everything became clear. But at the sight of what was

trying to reveal itself, I quickly wished that my senses hadn't cleared up. Five of the spirits at my door was not just anyone, they were my little brothers and sisters who I hadn't seen for years. They all had great big smiles on their faces as if they tried to let me know that they were alright, which started to ease the pain until I watched as one by one they faded away. The last spirit that stuck around had been hiding behind them, was now revealed to be my daughter Olivia.

"Good luck, Daddy," she said before disappearing.

My projection quickly withdrew into my body giving me back control. When I regained my senses to the fullest capabilities I shook my head to stabilize myself. But no matter what I did to keep myself contained, the thought of what I saw early sent me to an insane asylum. The sight of my family who I had not seen in years on my front door, suddenly fading away had scared me. There was only a certain time that I have heard of something like this happening. When someone who had just died stuck around to deliver the news to their loved ones.

After an incident with my father, all of the kids under his and my stepmother's custody were placed into foster care throughout various locations in the state. Normally, at least that was what I was told, the system would try to keep siblings together, but under the circumstances, they had separated them all to make it harder for any potential threats to their safety to find them. My brothers were in one town; my two youngest

sisters were in another, and my oldest sister was kept in the area so she wouldn't have to deal with changing schools. Unfortunately, as very few people would admit, foster care was responsible for deaths of several small children and several that do make it out often turn to a life of crime. So under these circumstances freaking out was necessary.

I reached into my pocket to grab my phone. I needed to call someone to make sure that my family was okay. If I remembered correctly my step-mom was supposed to visit the kids that afternoon. I called her. Pressing the number four on speed dial and hitting send, I began tapping the roof of my car in hopes of it somehow speeding up the process.

"The number you are trying to reach is unable to come to the phone, please leave a message after the beep," read the voice mail.

Shit. Stay calm, Dakota.

"Hey it's me, please tell me the kids are okay. I swore I just saw them in my house. Just give me a callback or text me I don't care. I am going to be working tonight so I may not be able to answer the phone. Just please let me know," I recorded before hanging up.

The beeps of my smart phone could not have sounded louder than in that moment as if it was the cue for the divine to take over. Ironically, something had begun to take over, my Shadow Hunter.

Chapter 4

Hunting Time

When my Shadow Hunter takes over, I remain in control. I could turn it off. But he was my closest connection to an all powerful source, so when he tells me that something needs to be done, I listen. He and I are one; me the vessel of this world, he the mind. He was the manifestation of the dark realms that came to my aid in a time of desperation, now he became my eyes into the darkness.

Parts of the world that were too dark for the majority, he could see like a stroll in the midday summer park. There was also a light hunter that was bound to my soul, but he was more vacant than the shadows. Both, however, came to me in times of greatness. Perhaps the night would be the start of one of those times. While on the drive to the case all of my senses began to enhance.

My eyes could see the individual veins in the surrounding grass, my ears tuned the music of plants up

to match a concert. Everything became enhanced. This was how I knew something going to happen. But on the drive, there was one task I needed to do before I hit the job. I had a vest packed with small gear and batteries sitting in my shotgun seat. It was a little small when I would try to sit while wearing it, forcing breathing to be difficult. In it was a digital voice recorder I would use to try to capture disembodied voices that I needed for another task. Documentation.

“April 22, 2011, Time is 1910 hours. Case #001. I am currently heading towards the investigation site. The building itself consists of two parts, an apartment, and large garage. Its purpose is to house road maintenance equipment for the small town of Murtaugh, and the apartment used to be the home of the former manager of the facility.

“Those who work there believe that the activity is being caused by the old manager and his wife who had both died shortly after moving away from the location. Both the current manager and the employees have reported footsteps, sounds of the machinery being messed with, shop doors violently shaking as if someone was trying to get in. This investigation shows no sign of potential harm to responders or clients. However, given the circumstances, it is best to observe all options just to be safe. At this site, the wife of the client will be waiting to lock me in the building for the night. Based on the information given the clients it also appears that the spirits allegedly were married

while they were alive. So it is best to be on the lookout for Hector and Tonya Johnson. It is best to note that both spirits have been known to possess a temper so it would be best to respect the premises.

"The client had asked me on repeated occasions during our meetings whether or not he needed to position anything in a certain way. I had reminded him that it was best to keep the place looking as it would on a normal workday. If anything was in the building that could compromise the results of the investigation, it would be best to document it for future references for the clients and for future investigations."

The self-briefing I gave was to help document the experience. Since my team was still new, I had sprung the idea to use an online video hosting service to post results from investigations. However, I wouldn't just post any tape, I would only post videos that contained legitimate anomalies. That way our presence was likely to attract more cases, with the clients under the impression that something was always caught seeing only videos with results.

I know that it was a bit devious to bring in people like that, but it was, in a weird way, a form of business. I never did it for the fame, I did it so that there was an easy way for my clients to know that something weird could truly be going on and this was my way to show I understood it more than anyone else. However, if it did bring fame, I saw that as an opportunity to try out new

endeavors to help people while enjoying things I have always wanted to do all at no cost to them.

And that night was my opening to experiment with the idea. If the results turned out well, it was going to be something I would set in stone. If not, then I would just have to experiment with others. Speaking of documenting it honestly, sucks that I didn't have a way to film some of this scenery. The way out to Murtaugh was pure countryside and farmland. I would say it was peaceful but personally knowing some its people, it would be a lie.

If you were the type to want a place away from the hustle and bustle of the city, Murtaugh was a good place to go. On any given day one can easily sit back and listen to the sounds of wind and birds hustling through the trees. Heck, if you stand in the right spot long enough, large herds of deer would walk right up to you. However, if you're ever in the area make sure you have about a half tank of gas. You will need it since the nearest town with a gas station was about thirty miles away.

So I guess that you could tell it was not a large town. People on television try to say they were from a small town because they only had one stoplight. Murtaugh didn't even have that. All that was there was a bar and an old hardware store. Regardless of what the local residents thought, the maximum population was about two-hundred not counting children. A majority of people that claimed to be from there lived outside

of city-limits, therefore didn't officially count as residents. However, there is one thing I can confirm, is that the area did have more residents than what the official census states, but they were all dead.

I guess that was why the town was a frequent spot for me to visit. For every living man, there was at least five dead. Spirits that have grown tired of the town of Murtaugh trying to hide the people they killed. Unfortunate for them, it was my job to give those victims a voice. Those neglected and abused by the masses, be they dead or alive, always had a nasty habit of finding me. In honesty, I do worry about what spirits I would find there because I knew how the living behaved. Every wife beater, rapist, drunk dumb-ass, and illegal hid out there with the secure knowledge that the police never are around, all thanks to a woman who sued county police when they gave her a ticket. Even the schools here were committing fraud so they could reap twice the money they could have because they knew nobody would bother to check. In which was the reason I chose to leave, but yet something kept bringing me back around.

I honestly could not tell you what it could have been. This place was a borderline ghost town. Nothing was out there but ghosts. It could be something supernatural that wanted me here. In retrospect just about every time I would come out here, something weird always happened. So for tonight's hunt, I had great confidence somebody was going to come out to play.

I began to see a green sign on the side of the road. "MURTAUGH ELEVEN MILES," it read. Perfect, since the speed limit on this stretch of the road was fifty-five I would arrive at my case in about six minutes, give or take depending on the train that went through town. As I drove closer I began to see the inside of the Snake River Canyon. I could see the individual folds of the rocks on the interior walls, a tiny waterfall seemingly trying to burst, and a few crows gathered on a couple trees. This was a typical sight out this way. Hardly anything came through here on an average day so the animals have found it to be a bit of a safe area. But with the way our country has been running, there was only a matter of time before the word safe became extinct. That would mean more ghosts for me to hunt, but so much more than I couldn't protect. If I were to survive, I would be one of the few who would be able to write history based on the words of the souls who died in battle.

But for now, it was time to write a hidden history. Which in this scenario only adds a few more pages to what is already here. But I needed to put a few masks on what was there because of my personal connections to the case. If I am to put up the results for the public eye than I do not want anyone bothering my family without both my and their word on it. The paranormal community was a family of its own being torn apart by pride and corruption that the promise of money can bring. I believe that if somebody had made a name

for themselves on a talent they genuinely enjoy, then let them have at it. But doing something just for the money and fame instantly makes you a fraud, which all a whole is tearing apart an almost four-hundred-year-old job.

But for now, I was the only hunter who mattered. The spirits here had known my family for a very long time and it was time to say "Hi." My grandmother was to meet me at the front door of the building to show me around and lock me inside for at least five hours. Because of my age, I needed to cut investigation time in half to avoid any legal issues, so there was a hidden hope to make somebody come out to play.

"Welcome to Murtaugh," reads a sign outside of the city limits. Within a few moments, I was parking in front of the local highway department building where my grandmother was waiting with the keys in her hand. She had waited for me to get out of my car before unlocking the building.

"Come on, I will show you where the guys kept saying that stuff was happening," she said.

"That would be appreciated," I replied.

She opened up the stone structured building revealing a yellow-carpeted hallway that split the apartment from the garage. At the time no one was residing in the apartment, so I had free access to it.

"Where would you like to go first?" asked my grandmother. I looked around to see if I could get a sense of

where everything was taking place. The whole location had the feeling of shadows wandering around.

"Preferably where it gets the most interesting," I said.

"We better get to the snow plows," she answered. We walked just a few feet to the left into a gravel floor garage with two snow plows and a company truck. From the front of the plow, we stood and she began to point towards the garage doors.

"Do you remember anything about Hector? Grandpa's old boss?" she asked.

"Not much. The only thing I really remember is that he and his wife died about a week after moving out," I answered.

"Well, it looks like after he died he managed to make his way back here. Because there have been several occasions when those doors would shake individually like someone was trying to get in."

"Hmm. Well on the days that they would shake was there any heavy wind or large trucks coming by?"

"That is just it. There wasn't anything that could have caused it. When the wind"

She was right. I have been in there enough times to know that when the wind did stir up the garage doors would act like something was trying to go through them, instead of shaking back and forth. "So by the sounds of it Hector is trying to open up shop, that would make sense," I said.

"Well, that is what everyone here thinks. His wife also has been felt around here," she said. Surprise, surprise. A couple that actually tried to stick together after death. It has been becoming a very rare sight.

"I wouldn't be surprised. Now wasn't there an area she liked to hang around a lot?"

"Yes. Upstairs. She would work on a lot of crafts in an area that mostly had nothing but scrap metal."

"Alright. I will definitely try to spend some time up there. Is there anything else that happened down here?"

"Yes actually. Follow me."

My grandmother leads me to a small flight of stairs. To the left was a door that leads into the bathroom. To the right was the main office of the building, my grandpa's office. "Your grandpa had been hearing a few things through here. In the bathroom he would hear voices coming from around the shop, mostly sounding like people at work," she said, "And from his office, he would hear somebody messing with the machines when he was in the middle of a meeting."

"So Hector and Tonya will not be the only ones joining tonight. Cool, that should make it interesting."

"All bets are off until you get finished.. By the way, grandpa said that you could use his office to set up your gear and sneak into the fridge for a drink if you need it. Just don't drink it all."

"Sweet. Tell him I said thanks."

"I will. Now hurry up and get your gear. I need to get some sleep."

With a nod of my head, I hurried out to my car and opened the side door to get my vest. A black tactical style vest that mimicked a special forces type get-up, but with a few modifications I made myself to become a walking surveillance van. Yet I was not sure of how to adjust the size so that it would fit more comfortably and still stay on right. Once secured I popped open my trunk and began grabbing my bags. Four bags full of various gear and two reels of CCTV cables to attach my cameras to the DVR system. Man, it was all heavy. I moved as quick as I could to position my base camp inside the building while there was still daylight.

When my bags were inside my grandma waved a good-luck then locked me inside. Finally, time for the hunt. I reached inside my vest and pulled out my phone to check the time. "8:05" read the display. A little behind schedule, but it was fine. The lights of the sunset still reached through the large windows like the hands of a kind woman reaching into pet a lonesome puppy. It was truly a beautiful sight. But then the tiniest hint of nightfall began creeping through, letting the tiny flickers of stars dance through. The sight of it reminded me of something, something that gave a true sense of admiration for what was in my life right now. The few stars I could see reminded me of candlelight flickers in the eyes of a soul trap inside its own fortress. It reminded me of Shandra. There must be something

to her that is important if she is stuck in my head. Now that I think about it, I was about to start looking for an old married couple that died a week apart. Perhaps I could ask them for relationship advice. What? They were old family friends. It wasn't like I was inviting an Incubus into my love life.

Then the cold sensation that flowed through my body gave way for my Shadow Hunter to take over. Somebody was looking for action. Inside the base camp, I began unloading my equipment onto an old desk.

First I readied the computerized gear, the DVR rig, and a laptop. The laptop was necessary to store investigation materials when the memory card on my cameras ran out of room. I placed it next to a large monitor that was connected to the hard drive of my DVR. This is what allowed me constant surveillance in places I was not present. When both devices were plugged into my power strip and running I plugged in a USB to USB network channel. This handy cord gave the laptop remote access to the DVR and allowed it to function as a second monitor. In the middle of the cord was a thick piece that decoded each device's separate operating systems into a neutral signal they both could understand. This gave me a similar networking set-up that I used with all of my computers back at my place.

Next, to the laptop, I placed a small silver and black case that held small equipment: EMF gauges, hand-held thermometers, a pocket night-vision camcorder,

digital voice recorders, and dowsing instruments. Throughout the night I would be swapping out individual pieces of equipment for different types of sessions. However, throughout the night I would keep my camcorder running so if I did see something, it was likely that my camera caught it.

However, I needed to position my DVR cameras to capture images while I was not present in certain areas. Still, in the boxes they came in so they wouldn't get broken mid-transit, I grabbed all four cameras and walked throughout the building. The first was positioned on a step looking towards the garage doors. The second was placed in a tiny room that was hidden away. It had a friendly, youthful vibe to it, almost like walking onto a playground. Hector had two boys, both now full grown adults serving time behind bars. If he was truly the one trying to run the shop, then there is a chance he was replaying memories from his life and could have been where his kids would play. Then I definitely needed to have a camera up here watching just in case. In the small room, there was a small spiral staircase that leads down into the apartment.

"I guess it wouldn't hurt to take a look around in here," I whispered.

As I walked down the staircase, I struggled to hold myself. My feet were triple the size of the stairs making every step difficult. After fifteen steps, I was finally in the apartment. The walls all were covered with dust-covered white paint. In certain spots, the dust wasn't

as thick showing that something had been covering the walls at a recent point. Perhaps old picture frames and posters. The floors were carpeted and reeked of cigarettes. I was not told anything happened back here, but just to be safe I should position a camera in there facing the hallway that nearly hid behind the staircase. Then last but not least I walked out of the apartment and positioned the final camera by the second garage door. Now I had full surveillance. I hurried back into the office to grab duct tape and the cables needed to connect the cameras to the system, placing rugs above each one to avoid tripping over them. The duct tape was to secure the cameras into position so they wouldn't be able to budge. This would prevent tampering until I got a hold of some stands. In the office, I made the final preparations. The time 8:55 pm. according to my laptop. That was when it began while I was kneeled to the ground assembling the power situation.

A woman had sneaked behind me and shouted, "Get Out!"

It caught me off guard, something happening so quickly. I was expecting company but not that early in the investigation. Most of you would have probably bolted out leaving the gear behind, which is understandable for rookie investigators, but for me, I needed to move quickly and find a way to capture whoever was yelling at me on record. I grabbed a digital voice recorder and my night-vision camera and ran outside of the office. Next to the small stair that leads to this hall-

way is where the fridge stood. On the top, there was a box full of screws that I pulled forward and braced my camcorder against it. In front of it, I placed my voice recorder facing outward towards the shop. Both would emit a static interference that was able to amplify a spirit's voice, or popularly known as an EVP, so I took this opportunity to strike up a conversation.

"Who is out here?" I asked.

Protocol for EVP sessions was to wait at least ten seconds to allow for spirits to speak. Many theories were in place to try to explain why this happens. Some said that it took a few moments for the spirit's voice to cross dimensions; others say that because of the low frequencies spirits are visible in, it took a moment to say what they needed to say. Personally, I believed that it was the latter of the two. It is easy for someone to come up with the idea that there are leaks in dimensional fields that beings we could not see could utilize, the idea is only theoretical until mainstream science has its way.

I started hearing whispers, but they were too quiet to understand. So I kept going with follow-ups. "May I please ask that whoever was screaming at me to show yourself in front of this device on top of the fridge; maybe say your name into the red light so I will be able to hear it later," I shouted.

A few moments later I followed with, "If you are the one who had screamed at me, I am not mad. I am not upset. Actually, I am kind of glad that you did. You see

I was brought into help you and whoever else is here gain a voice."

In my head, I begin to hear an older woman's voice asking, "How?"

"I know you're here. I know that there is actually several of you here. And that you have been spooking people who currently work here. I am here to help both sides understand each other so that you all can be here without troubles. Don't worry I am not here to harm you in any way. I am just here to serve as a messenger, so to speak."

Silence. That was okay, I wasn't in a real hurry.

"I'll tell you what, I am going to get a camera. Not a special one like the one on top of the fridge, just a normal little camera and I am going to take some pictures. And all you will have to do is make yourself appear in the shots. If you can't or don't want to, that is perfectly up to you. But I would imagine that you would like to show yourself, just to give the workers here a scare. I would imagine someone in your position would like to scare people just to have a little fun. I don't really blame you if you did, I would probably do the same."

I sneaked back into the office to grab my digital camera. It was a typical 8-megapixel digital camera, no special features, no special modifications. It was just a typical camera with a really bright flash. I stood just outside the doorway leading to the office and pointed my camera in the same direction as the night vision camcorder. I took one picture, the flash revealed a

shadow that began to dart away. I watched the preview screen to see if anything was caught. Nothing.

"Alright, I know you are moving around. Why don't you pose for a picture or two? Or maybe show yourself to the little video camera I have going right now?"

I let the flash from my camera blanket the room. I observed carefully with each shot, watching the shadows move back and forth. A couple did as I asked and approached the fridge, something had to have been caught. Wait where have been my manners?

"Hold on a second everyone. I forgot to introduce myself. I guess you all might be a bit more friendly if you knew more about me. Well, there is not much to tell to be honest. My name is Dakota Frandsen. My grandfather, the current manager of this place has asked me to come in and speak with you. Just to find out how many of you are here. There are only two names I was given of people that are believed to be settling here, Hector and Tonya Johnson. If you two are truly here, then I must ask for you two to come forward sometime tonight if you can. I was told that my grandparents once went to school with your sons and that my grandfather actually worked for you before you passed away. Is that true?" I asked, "If so then I hope you and I can become acquainted."

In the distance, I begin to hear what sounded like a smoker's cough. This was a good clue because both Hector and Tonya heavily smoked and eventually died from lung cancer. I needed to move closer; my Shadow

Hunter wanted to move closer. So I grabbed the camcorder and slid it into a chest pocket on my vest to allow it to continue to record; then I reached for the voice recorder and held it out almost like an offering.

Inside my jeans pocket, I felt a phantom sensation of my phone going off. I reached into pick it up, realizing it was nothing, but pressed a random button to get a look at the time. "9:10 pm." Sunset had been over for a least a half an hour and the only lights in the entire place came from my gadgets. It was time for the demon eyes to appear. I felt my left chest pocket to see if I remembered to slide them in, with success. I stood my ground I carefully inserted the contacts, allowing my vision to slowly adjust. Now everything in the room was visible but held a reddish glow, something that was anticipated. But regardless of everything's appearance, the only thing I was happy about was the fact I could actually see.

All around me shadows would dodge my movements like I was spinning a jump-rope around in a game of helicopter. I did not know why they fled, but if it had anything to do with my appearance, it was almost confirmed that the mysterious figure I mimicked was dangerous. I thought that he may show himself sometime that night.

"You know I am going to be here all night. So you might as well come out and play."

I snapped a few more photos of the room. The shadows had stopped moving. It was about time that I fol-

lowed suit. In my head, I could hear a deep voice demanding, "Grab the motion sensor."

It was him, my Shadow Hunter. He would often time speak up when something needed to be said, be it an unfortunate truth or a whisper of trickery, he knew what needed to be done. "Set it in the other garage."

The next area I decided, well was politely suggested, to sweep through was the next garage over. The wall that separated the two appeared newer than the rest of the building. This must have been what the recent renovations were for. That probably pissed off whoever was there.

The purpose of the renovations was to split the original garage into two. One for the vehicles, the other for the department's tools. I looked around just to make a mental note of it all. "Put the alarm on the table facing the garage," whispered my Shadow Hunter.

Good idea. If Hector has been shaking the doors then this alarm could let me know if he was getting ready to it. Following orders, I placed the alarm on the edge of the table and faced it towards the garage door. "Alright, if anybody is in here and would like to speak here is your chance to let me know. This here, when I turn it on, it will sound off an alarm when you move in front of it," I said pressing the switch. An alarm sounded off notifying the user that it was armed and ready. "There is your cue. If you want to talk to me anywhere within the next four hours, all you have to do is set off the alarm."

Silence can be a great teacher of focus. This was my moment to "scan" the room, one of my many tricks. It was something that would allow for me to get a sense of what was around me. Much like the scanners, you would see in movies that would detect planes, I would be able to sense threats like this. For now, I just needed to sense whether or not I was in the presence of somebody I could not directly see. The chairs in here were not that comfortable, but it was all that was available and got the job done. I needed to focus.

Breathe in. Breathe out. My signal moved outward. Breathe in. Breathe out. It was empty. I was literally talking to the air. Great. I guess I should've moved where the signal got warmer.

I left the alarm in the room primed for whoever decided to interact with it. It was loud enough for me to notice it from any point in the building, so if I was sitting in the apartment I could respond within moments. However, where the signal was warm I would have trouble getting into the cramped space known as the upstairs, where the landing only welcomed the vertically challenged. Something had been hiding from me up there, perhaps because of my size they thought of it as a safe spot for the night. Well, they are wrong, I have been in places much more cramped to further my career, like old mine shafts. At least in the cramped upstairs of the highway department, I had room to sit.

The stairs that held one of my cameras almost felt like they were about to break underneath me. The age

of the place played a lot of tricks like that, some of which could be associated with the activity that allegedly took place. But I needed to see things from the client's eyes, then use my own to see what had happened. Sometimes people tend to be misinformed about the possibilities of what could have happened before their very eyes, other times there could have been other influences that made things seem unnatural.

Once upstairs I needed to lean over in order to walk around. Space up there was just under four feet in height, which would make things difficult, on top of the various objects that cluttered the floors. For anyone who was of average size, this would be difficult to maneuver, so just imagine how it felt for the almost seven-foot giants of the group such as myself. My back had enough problems as is and this only made things worse. But my focus had leaped from my discomforts to the cold sensation that had flown through my body as if I was nothing. I could feel the vibrations of a life-essence flowing through me like ripples in the water. I knew somebody was up there and standing near me. Judging by the softness of the breeze, there was a woman near me. So I sat down and set my digital voice recorder on the floor. "Tonya is that you?" I asked. A gentle whisper blew into my ear, but it was too quiet for me to understand.

"I know that you have spent a lot of time working on projects up here. From what I heard they were actually

quite impressive," I said. I needed to get her comfortable with me being here if she was ever going to talk, and when it comes to the artistic type, complimenting their work is an effective method, much like how a comedian enjoys meeting fans in random places just because of their support.

"You know I would love to see some of it. Do you happen to know if one of the pieces you worked on is still here?" I asked. To tell you the truth I was genuinely curious about Mrs. Johnson's work, as I would if anyone else told me they were involved in such endeavors. This gave me much more insight into the human soul than the most powerful of psychics could see.

Towards the far corner of the room, piled with several scraps of metal, the sound of shuffling echoed throughout the building. It looked like somebody wanted to show off. I didn't blame her, I would have wanted to show off a bit myself if I was ever in her state. When the clutter and clangs settled, a welded horse was uncovered. It almost appeared as if it was made for a child, gentle to the touch yet durable for the accidental drops, traits that are hardly ever put out into modern products.

"Did you make that little horse?" I asked, "It is actually pretty cool. Something tells me that you made it for a child, perhaps for one of your sons? What were their names again?" Protocol for paranormal investigations was to also dig up as much personal information on the spirits to verify their identity. Luckily, I had

the appropriate resources to learn about these people, personal friends of their kids, or on easier terms, my grandparents.

"You know, my grandparents actually went to school with your kids. Did you know that?" I asked the spirits. Please don't be offended by repetition, it was another protocol I needed to follow while on the job.

As many could feel when these connections are revealed, the sensation of relief could be felt vibrating the air. This was definitely a good sign. Mrs. Johnson had begun to trust me. "So you wouldn't mind if I stuck around, knowing that you and I have a mutual connection?" I asked, "You know what? How about we play a game?" My colleagues have suggested to me in the past that spirits tend to communicate in several ways, but the easiest method for them was simply knocking, so being that the spirits had known my family for quite some time, I figured it would be best to make things easier.

"Here is what I am going to do, I will ask a question and you will simply respond with a yes or a no. But instead of saying it I want you to knock. One knock for yes, two for no. If you are wondering why I am asking you to do this, the answer is simple. If you knock, I will have a better chance of actually hearing you. If you find some loose metal nearby to respond with, that would be even better. So, if you're up for it please let me know."

I paused to wait for an answer. Silence. As I readied to speak words of encouragement a loud bang came from behind me. I peered to catch a glimpse of what could have made that noise, with the only result being an old street sign propped up against the wood railing. "So you are alright with it?" I asked to confirm my suspicions. Within a few moments, I noticed the sign being pushed backward, slowly inching upward, as if someone was trying to keep it from falling. Then the sign started to dance on its own, like liquid mercury getting ready to dance, as another loud bang sounded off.

Shadows around me began to adjust as if something had intruded. "Is there someone around that you all are afraid of?" I asked, a little nervous of what could be the answer. The shadows continued to stir. The sign started to ring like an air-force alarm. These spirits were afraid of something.

"Hey boss, I am heading home," shouted a male voice.

"What the hell?" I whispered

I sat and listened to the sound of individual pieces of gravel separate from each step. Somebody was in here. I hurried over to the railing, gripping onto my equipment while avoiding head injury from the low ceiling. With excitement, I focused my gear towards the snow plow where the sounds appeared to come from. From the side of the plow stood a shadowy figure that appeared more solid than the rest, not forming to the objects around it, but stood on its own much

like that of a typical person. It walked slowly towards the door moving as if it was just another guy heading home. Opening the locked door, it walked right outside.

I hurried down the stairs with little care to how the stairs felt. I needed to get outside. As I ran out the front door, nearly breaking through it, I was soon to discover I was alone. Tricky bastards. But hey, who could be mad with the view of the starlight? I pulled out my voice recorder to record a statement.

"Time is now 2200 hours. I just pursued a shadow figure outside of the investigation site. From what I was able to tell it was not aware of my presence suggesting that inside the area also contains a few forms of residual energies. This particular spirit appeared to be a male of average height. A former employee of the department liked his line of work. However, something doesn't seem right that it lead me outside. I understand the residual energy could be reflecting a person just wanting to go home after work, but something about this feels different. What could there be out here that they want me to see?"

I took a moment to think about the situation, then I remembered something. "Wait. I remember reading about an old legend that is in the area. The sighting of a young boy playing around the railroad tracks with a chainsaw in hand. I wonder if it is possible we can get the boy to come out and play."

Murtaugh was a small town, much smaller than what a majority of people would describe as such. The

only two stores in town that made a decent living was a bar and a tool shop. Both were within fifty feet of one another.

The bar was said to have been haunted itself, but since the owner himself often was in trouble with the law, I wouldn't take it seriously. Between the bar and the highway department building was an old set of railroad tracks, that held a few interesting stories of their own. However what worried me was that around this section it was not stories of cars stuck on the tracks, or even the suicide of a broken heart like this town was notorious for. But a rather interesting story of a small boy running around with a chainsaw. Given that the bar was about twenty feet away from the tracks my immediate thought was that it was simply a hallucination, but if there was some truth it would make for an interesting story. Not only that, it gave me an excuse to admire the starlight.

Each step I took moving closer to the tracks felt like some sort of journey through uncharted territory, streets that I used to walk now covered in shadow. A security blanket for the darkness of each soul so they could dance freely. The screams, the howls of coyotes in the distance, rumors of spirits roaming freely in the whispers of a ghost town. This was the setup for a death in a thriller movie. The wind stirred up near the abandoned buildings, adding whistles and rustles of leafs to the scene. Somebody was ready to play.

Giggling of a small boy circled around me. The sensation felt like a sneaky little brother trying to attack an older sibling, a sensation I missed from my own family. But it was clear I had somebody's attention.

"I hear that there is a young man out here who likes to play. Why don't you come on out? I won't hurt you," I shouted. The giggling grew louder, almost sounding like multiple children. Like typical Idaho wind, it silenced quicker than it started. But the rustling of the bushes continued. "Is that you young man, or is it another neglected dog?" I asked.

The rustling grew louder as if the plants tried to intimidate a potential threat.

"I see," I whispered.

The bushes ended their dance as the chainsaw started to scream from behind. I slowly slipped my gear into my pockets and readied for the attack. Behind me, I could see a small group of sagebrush that shook like an animal was hiding inside ready to pounce. The blade of a small chainsaw slowly grew outward, aimed for my legs.

"I'm gonna get you!" shouted the little boy. A bright white light slowly grew around me, changing the color of my uniform. About time he came to visit.

The sliding of the chains grew stronger as the boy rushed forward. Tiny feet smacking against the hard road, with each other step seemingly labored by a heavy machine. A minor flaw for an attack, desserts for

the attacked. The sounds of the engine grew quickly. All stopped by an angelic hand.

"What the!" shrieked the young boy. As many would probably be shocked of, and perhaps a little intimidated by, my hand had stopped the chainsaw.

The boy looked up to see my face, with and admiration close to that of a superhero. "Better be careful young man. You may end up hurting someone," I said. Something about my voice triggered a sense of familiarity to the child.

"You!" he shouted.

"What about me?" I asked.

"You are from the prophecy."

"What do you mean?"

"A man who stares in shadow with an eye that holds a storm will gather eight souls to join him as he walks the night making a power of eleven. His team will comprise of One, a giant with a soul of light and dark. One, a wounded warrior of the past. One, the daughter not bound to time. Two sisters soaked in loss and blood. One, child of the stars. I uh think there is more but I am not sure. There is something about a great change that comes when they come together after a great battle emerges."

The thought of being involved with a prophecy was a headache, and it coming from a child doesn't help. The look in his eyes was a mix of admiration, fear, and a hidden slice of hope. The little guy was serious about

this. "That sounds interesting," I said, desperately trying to keep my mind from boiling.

"If I am right then you can help me," he said.

"How so?"

"I need you to help me cross over. I don't want to be tied down here when it begins."

"When what begins?"

"The war. Please, you have to help me before things move any further."

I could see the fear in his eyes, whatever was coming was going to be intense. "Alright, I'll see what I can do," I answered. How would I be able to help this kid? My Light Hunter once again took over, I had no control. From a wave of a hand a bright light appeared on the tracks, a doorway into the great serenity.

"Go, there will be people waiting for you on the other side," said My Light Hunter.

"I know. I hope that because I was never born I get another chance," he whispered.

"That is one of the many reasons for reincarnation my friend. So we can live a completely new life to add to the knowledge of the cosmos."

"I hope you are right Dakota. Good luck on your path."

"Thanks."

The little boy walked towards the light. The sight reminded me of seeing a small child on their first day of school. Nervous, frightened, thoughts rolling through his head like semi-trucks rolling on a downhill highway

with broken brakes with the only hope of stopping was for it to all come crashing down, yeah it was all too familiar.

Then I remembered something my grandpa did that helped me relax a bit that gave me an idea.

"Hey," I called out to the child. He turned to face me with the look of worry. "Don't get too crazy with the chainsaw, okay?" I joked.

The boy giggled and walked through the light. I watched as his soul became the very light he entered. It was an amazing sight. When the light closed its door, a gentle breeze moved outward like an explosion, whispering that someone has left this realm. I looked towards the stars and noticed that a star was moving on its own, not shooting across the sky, but slid across like it was a lily pad in a pond.

My focus was not extraterrestrials, given the number of air force bases in the area. But this one intrigued me. It appeared to react to the light I summoned to help the child across the divide. I wondered what it could have been doing, but my sights quickly soured with the black mists in the horizon slowly fading away. I have seen those formations before and they usually indicated that it was a dark being moving around.

With one final glimpse of the stars, I decided it was best for me to return to the case. There will be a special collection for the events that happened outside, but it would not be observed as the main case. In some cases it would not be a good idea to leave a case like this, but

the town was located in the nearest sense of nowhere I could think possible, the only thing that could interrupt the case was a loose animal. I also knew my client would not mind at all, given that it was phenomena close to the original site.

Throughout the night, I spent my time trying to communicate with whoever was still in the building. But after I had reentered, it all died down. I was barely able to pick up any sense of a spirit. In fact, the only incident that I was able to document was interaction with the alarm earlier. So with heavy eyes and the final strokes of an awakened mind I had offered up a deal to the spirits using the motion sensor.

"Alright, it is almost time for me to go, and I know that you all are not wanting to talk much, so let us make a deal right here. If whoever was just talking to me using the alarm is still here, I would like for you to do it just one more time. If you guys promise me to settle down and not spook or harm anyone that comes through here on a normal day, I will no longer come to stay the night to bother you again. I will still be around, I might say 'Hello', but I will not stay to bother you. But only if you do not hurt anybody unless they had it coming. If you agree to these terms, I will pack up my stuff and go right now. Again you cannot harm anyone, do you understand me? If so then sound off the alarm," I shouted. In the moments of silence, I could feel the sensation that someone in the room was confused about the terms.

"I don't care if you occasionally give an employee here a good scare just to have a little fun, just don't go too far and don't even try to hurt anyone unless it is in a form of defense. Does that clear things up?" I asked. The alarm screamed.

"Alright. Thank you for your time. I will now pack up my things and go. You won't have to deal with me anymore as long as you keep to your side of the agreement," I said. My cameras and voice recorders were tucked into my vest which I began to unstrap once I silenced and holstered the alarm. It was time for me to go, as I had promised.

As with many endeavors that allow one to climb the appropriate ladders, disassembling my investigation was quicker than putting it all together. The cords, the battery packs, everything was neatly put away and hauled into the trunk of my car. My vest was placed back into the shotgun seat so I could prepare the self-debriefing before the ride. In the last moments I doubled checked the entire building to make sure that I didn't forget anything and when it all checked out I locked up and walked out to my car. From the driver's side, I pulled out my digital recorder and readied myself for the final words of the night.

"It is approximately 0200 hours on the 23rd of April of the year 2011. I had finally finished the investigation at the highway department building, with bets on impressive results coming in the evidence review. Tonight several events took place that almost wrote a

horror novel on its own, on top of adding to a few mysteries that had yet to be solved. I am honestly too tired to talk much further, and knowing that I have thirty hours of footage to look through within the next couple of weeks I should probably shut up and get into bed. All in all, it was a good night that marks a historical event," I said into the microphone. I tucked the recorder into the vest and drove to my grandparent's house so I could stay the night.

The drive felt much longer than it was that night. My grandparent's house was about half a mile away, with nothing but a few farms and a couple houses on each side of the street. Some might say it was a pleasant part of the area, but at night it was almost a recipe for disaster because of the lack of excitement to keep a driver awake. One might get lucky and tenderize a deer on impact, but often times they would just stand up and walk away after being hit. Sometimes they even seem to get a bit of an attitude after surviving an event like that, but that only really happened in the spring. On a hill was where my grandparents lived, and that was where I needed to make a turn.

I pulled into the driveway as slowly as I could to avoid stirring up the pack of dogs my grandparent's owned. They were already outside and started barking, alerting the rest that an unknown presence has entered their turf. I hurried over to the fence of the backyard, leaving my gear behind in a locked vehicle for the night, to let them know it was me. My grandmother

had been waiting outside in a nightgown watching over the dogs when she saw me.

"How did it go?" she asked.

"Well, it was interesting, to say the least. I am pretty sure something was caught on the gear," I answered.

"Good, so are you just going to leave your stuff in the car until morning?"

"Yeah, I am just too tired to carry it all in. I am going to start looking through it tomorrow."

"Alright, but you might want to be careful about what you try to look through. Your mom and your aunt are visiting tomorrow."

Shit. When my mother and my aunt were visiting that meant four high pitched squeals, or better known as my sister and cousins, could cover anything I was trying to do. Again like I said before I like kids, but I was at a point in my life where I needed to worry about myself more than anyone else. I could not deal with kids, and going from previous patterns there was also a likelihood that they would ask me to babysit. Even worse.

"Cool, maybe I can show them stuff I caught from last night," I said.

I know I just fired off a rant about seeing the kids, but please understand I did not mind occasional visits. When I was working on something, however, I wanted more alone time. I figured since I didn't work as a babysitter and didn't have any children of my own, this would be alright. But the timing was never a supporter.

"Maybe. And also you can stay in the other bedroom if you would like," said my grandmother.

Right now I did not care who was coming by, I just wanted to catch some sleep. My grandmother had offered me one of the more comfortable rooms in the house to stay in for the night, which I gladly, yet almost subconsciously, accepted. That bed was definitely comfortable.

Chapter 5

Troubled Legacies

Morning.

The sounds of birds singing outside around the bird feeders eased a morning recovery from a long night. Sunlight reached through the folds of the curtains on a dust-covered window and leaped into my eyes to ready me for the day. I arose from the bed arched over to allow my senses to return. First breaths of the morning slowly restarting all functions to my brain, and for just a few moments I feel nothing. Slowly the world collects itself within my eyes. The realization came forward about what time it was when the smell of pizza and the yells of small children filled the house. They're here.

I reached for the knob on the door and twisted. The clicks of an old door knob alarmed the dogs sending four dachshunds and a shi-tzu to my feet. I knelt over

to greet them. From the tops of my eyes, I noticed four youthful faces staring at me from a blue tiled kitchen counter. Two boys and two girls.

"Morning guys," I said faking a smile through the slumber.

"Morning Koda, how was the ghost hunt last night?" asked my sister.

My sister, Barbara, was a blond nine years old with glasses possessing thicker lenses than the largest of telescopes known. The stereotypes placed on blonds were not appropriate but girls like my sister didn't help. She often was clueless to what had happened to her on a day-to-day basis. But regardless of the circumstances, she was my sister and I had to put up with her.

"It was good, lots of weird stuff happened," I said.

My sister had the mentality of a 3rd grader so I knew she wouldn't be able to understand a lot of the specifics of what I do. All she knew was that I talked to ghosts. The way she viewed my nightly activities was better for her in the long run since she was unaware that there was always the subtle chance of a ghost hunt turning into a showdown between a vigilante and an undiscovered criminal.

"So can we see the stuff you caught?" asked one of my cousins. I had grown up with my aunt's two oldest boys, my cousins were almost like my brothers. Because my aunt practically diapered her oldest, I took her youngest boy, Evan, under my wing so he wouldn't turn into a neurotic basket case like his brother, Curtis.

"Ah... give me a chance to look through it first, okay kiddo?" I said.

"Okay," he said.

My grandmother held out a plate with a few slices of a meat lover's pizza.

"Here you go Dakota," she said.

I grabbed the plate and found a spot on a nearby couch. Next to the kitchen was a small area arranged like a living room for the younger ones in the family. It was a simple hangout so the kids would have something to do while visiting. I have always found comfort here, a place that I could just relax and think over everything that would happen between each weekly visit when I still lived with my mother.

The taste of the pizza was nearly refreshing. The sausage and pepperoni slowly awakening my organs like the gears of a factory. I was slowly warming up to match the day. My senses had been slowed due to a mind that was half asleep, now gaining speed thanks to appropriate timing. I glanced over at a clock on the wall to check the time. The clock read a few minutes before noon. At least I got my ten hours of sleep.

A movie was playing on a small flat screen, hanging above the kitchen doorway, that nearly hypnotized the kids. We all had the nasty habit of glancing toward any screen that was turned on regardless of whatever was on. In some senses, it gave our parents an extra babysitter, but in so many others it became our downfall. My sister and I were better about snapping our fo-

cus into anything that was needed, but my cousins not so much. One could slaughter their friends right before their own eyes, yet they wouldn't budge if their favorite cartoon was on. Their mother never helped the situation, she was the type to try to execute anyone that yelled at her kids, even when the shouts could have been nothing more than warnings to dangers that could soon manifest.

When my plate had been cleared I set it on the floor to let the dogs clean whatever residue was left. For these dogs, all it took was the weakest of smell to trigger a feeding frenzy. I walked over the dogs as their tongues would push the plate away as they tried to clean it. Eventually, the smallest of the pack placed his paw on the plate to hold it in place.

I stood next to the stools and glanced over to the movie to see what the kids were watching. "Why in the hell are you guys watching this?" I asked.

The movie was a paranormal romance flick that nearly drove teenage girls with undeveloped minds into a raging tsunami. I wouldn't mind the movie so much if they didn't portray the girlfriend as such a wimp. Even if she was a mere prophet at least give her something to fight with if she needed to! Not only that but the boyfriend was usually a deadbeat.

"Because it's awesome," Curtis whined. Curtis, like I said before, was a neurotic basket case because of his mother. All he would ever do, without being forced, would sit on the couch and watch TV. I am not against

having a day just to feel lazy, but come on, at least do something with your life while you're still young.

"Of course you would think it is Curtis, you're too chicken shit to even get off your ass," I said. He curled up his nose and growled as his mother marched into the room.

"Why in the hell are you yelling at him?" she screamed. I looked over to Curtis who possessed a giant grin seeing his blind momma lion come to his rescue. This was a dance I was all too familiar with at the time, but here there is an adjustment in my favor.

"I wasn't yelling," I said.

"Bull shit! Yes, you were!"

"No, I was simply telling your son that he needs to get outside more."

"He fucking doesn't! He is fine the way he is!"

"When a child doesn't want to do anything besides sit and watch T.V. all day, there is an issue."

"Well, all you do is sit around and play on the computer!"

"At least there is good money behind what I do!"

Like a stubborn teenage girl, she curled her nose and left the room. Curtis almost mimed the motion but stayed in his seat to avoid missing out on any part of the movie. I shook my head in disbelief and walked over to the dog-licked plate. As I leaned over I could hear my aunt continuing to complain about me to my grandfather. I hurried the plate over to the kitchen sink and rushed to the living room to listen in.

"But Dad," wailed my aunt.

"Enough is enough. When you start fighting with kids you have already lost, how many times do I have to tell you that?" said my grandfather. Pretty pathetic that a guy in his fifties still has to hear his grown daughters whine like teenagers.

"Hey Grandpa," I said with a gentle wave.

"Hey, D.T. how did last night go?" he asked. My grandfather had a nickname for myself and my cousin Curtis that would consist of the initials of our first and middle names, mostly because we were his two oldest grandkids and our middle names were both Taylor (so given that my last name is Frandsen I bet some of you may realize how confused I was when kids would start using the texting acronym DTF at school).

"Actually it was quite interesting. I got ran out about two hours in," I answered.

"Did something scare you that bad?"

"Not really. I was screamed at from the get-go but later on, I was chasing a shadow out of the building."

"Really, do you have any idea who it was?"

"Somebody who was getting off work."

"How do you figure?"

"Cause the shadow literally said, 'Hey boss I'm heading home,' and got out of the snowplow."

"Really? Did you manage to get that on film?"

"I am not sure. After I got back I just crashed on the bed."

"That good of a night?"

"Heck yeah. One hell of a start to the job."

"Well, I am glad I was able to help you."

"Thank you for that by the way."

"You're welcome kiddo."

"I will be sure to get you the results in at least a couple weeks."

"Take your time with it. I don't want you missing out on anything."

"I know, but to keep up with the teams already in the area that is my goal."

"Are you sure that you want to do that? You are just starting out."

"Since I am one of the youngest people in the field I almost need to. I know this is just a hobby, but I need to make things look good just in case it goes somewhere."

"I see. Looks like you have it all under control."

"So far but, soon, there may be an addition to the crew."

"Oh really? Is she cute?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is all that matters."

"Exactly. Anyway, I am gonna grab my laptop and get started on evidence review. There are too many distractions to look through my DVR and audio but I can get started on pictures."

"Good luck. Let me know if you see anything."

"I will."

My very first official investigation brought another spell of beginner's luck that night. An addictive fragrance that pushed one to godlike potentials. Everything that happened, from the screams of deceased old hags to a young child that attempted to chainsaw me, the chances of none of it getting caught on camera was nearly impossible. My assumptions only took into consideration the events I personally witnessed, but what my equipment saw could tell an entirely different story. In more ways than one situation like these often rendered paranormal research into pseudoscience, it was difficult to get any results to repeat themselves. It isn't much of a surprise though, technically the things I search for are mostly acknowledged as the makings of stories.

Anyone who studied psychology at any level would likely recognize these situations more than the average person since it literally took someone realizing that there are several physical effects that associate with changes in mood for it to become a legitimate field. It was only a matter of time before something similar were to happen in my field of research. In fact in some circles, that push was already happening.

I slowly walked through the hallway back into the kitchen. The kids were still frozen to the screen as I walked by, clueless of my presence until I was out the door. The Murtaugh countryside scent filled the air that seemed to almost dance on the wings of the birds and butterflies. I stopped on a wooden deck that

I helped my grandfather build to study the mountains that almost looked like drawings from this distance. The clear skies made them appear just as blue as the sunny day. Rain clouds slid through each lip giving the mountains a sweet countryside kiss. A storm was approaching, and around these parts, it multiplied in intensity because of the nearby lake. Rainfall often began as light tears of a new child and would shift into waterfalls capable carving the sharpest of diamonds in a matter of moments.

I needed to hurry and get my computer before the storm hit. Anyone with common sense should know that water and electronics don't mix. My gear was safe inside my car, from both rain and earthquakes of childhood carelessness, but I needed to give into risk just for now so I could get started on evidence review.

The deck was enclosed with a four-foot wood railing my grandfather and I put in so the dogs could have access to fresh air when work needed to be done in the yard. On each side of the railing, an opening was made for a gate, one to the yard the other to the driveway. The gate towards the driveway was hard to open because of a slight dip in the mountain landscape it was built on.

In Idaho, there was no such thing as flat ground, even flooring inside houses had a slight tilt once the place had enough time to conform to the ground. You would think that construction crews got better at adjusting the land to fit their needs, but ninety percent of

the crews around here had an IQ that matched eighth graders and they constantly were behind schedule. One of the ways money is treated like toilet paper in this country, constantly trying to wipe up the shit that is in power.

The gravel in the driveway gave way under my foot with each step. About fifteen feet into the driveway the ground began to harden, about right next to my car. I grabbed the handle on the driver's side door and opened up to reveal a worn leather seat with a black tactical vest blending in the fabric. I reached into the pockets to grab my digital and night vision camera to get a hold of their SD memory cards once I was inside. Just under the steering wheel, a little towards the left was a latch that popped open the trunk. A large thunk sounded off as the trunk sprung open uncovering my equipment.

On top of a black mass of bags was my computer bag. Inside a black satchel-like bag was my window to the rest of a world I built myself. With it, over the next couple weeks, I was to build more to the world with its first drops of life-force finally spread through its winds. Once the soft handle of the bag was in my hand and to my side I closed the trunk. As I turned back I saw my sister, cousin, mother, aunt, and grandmother walking out of the house. "Hey Dakota, can you watch the boys while we go out shopping, thanks," shouted my aunt.

'You fucking bitch,' I thought to myself. That woman was leaving two needy brats with a man that

didn't need kids around him 24/7 and a kid trying to build his own world. The reason I went out on my own was that I was sick of babysitting kids that were not mine. I did not adopt them, nobody was injured, nobody in the military, I was not paid to watch them, they were just dropped at my feet. I would have just jumped in my car and bolted if the only other babysitter available wasn't my grandfather.

"Fine," I said trying to hold back the frustration. It was almost pointless, like shoving a piece of paper in fresh lava and expecting it to stop an eruption. But with my aunt, sometimes, you might as well burn the school. I hurried back into the house before my knucklehead cousins decided to wild since their mother was finally gone. Sure enough, they started swinging the moment I hit the screen door.

"Would you two knock it off?!" I screamed. They both froze in fear until Curtis gained enough moxie to smack his brother on the back of the head.

"You little punk," I whispered. I don't like to hit kids, but Curtis thought he had a shield near because his mother kept a diaper on him for twelve years, he needed a reality check. I kneeled closer Curtis, placing my eyes just three inches from his.

"You like to start swinging? That is okay," I whispered, "But listen here."

I latched onto his chin to force his full attention. Pulling his skin forward to force a fish face, his saliva began to brew in his efforts to speak.

"Shut up and listen," I said while slowly squeezing. Tears began to form, clouding his glasses that sat so close to his eyes.

"You are much bigger than your brother, if you keep this up you could hurt him so bad that his death would be on your head. I don't care if he is being an asshole and tormenting you unless he is beating on your sister or anyone else, I don't want to see or hear about you hurting him, do you understand?" I asked him.

Curtis couldn't talk, and by the look in his eyes I could tell that he wasn't going to, so I looked over to his brother. "Evan, the same goes to you. Do you understand?" I asked him. Evan nodded.

"Good."

I let go of Curtis so he could adjust his lower jaw back into place and moved my hand to his shoulder. I placed my open hand on the opposite shoulder of Evan's, boxing them in with my arms.

"Do you guys remember what Grandpa and I told you better be happening if you get in a fight?" I asked them. They shook their heads no.

"We told you that if you ever get in a fight; you better be defending yourself, defending someone who is in need, or defending something that is important. That way you are less likely to get in serious trouble, right?" I asked them.

"Yeah," answered Evan with a tone of worry.

"Good. Now Curtis, if your brother starts throwing punches here, is what you do."

I grabbed Evan's arm and twisted it behind his back while using my other arm to lift him up. "Block his shots, tie him up, then squeeze!" I yelled as I squeezed his bone-thin body.

Evan tried to shout for help but my arm was crushing his lungs, a trick I always used to calm fighting boys. His thoughts of retaliating were weakened from lack of oxygen, he couldn't do anything even if he wanted.

"Koda, please. Let... go," he struggled. I dropped him on his feet to let him recover. He leaned forward to catch his breath while his brother began laughing. Evan then rotated his head like an owl to face his brother with squinted eyes.

"Now Evan, if your brother is the one causing problems, unplug the TV and run like heck," I said. Evan held his lips together as he laughed, making him sound like a dolphin with a sore throat. Curtis crunched his face in anger in response to a truth that his mother also tried to diaper.

I know that my actions may be misconstrued as overkill or just plain abusive. But in all honesty, it was for the best. My cousins' father was a bipolar maniac, and I seemed to be the only one that knew certain disorders could pass onto the children through genetic dispositions. All of the signs were present, hinting at the chance of a major disaster if they ever snapped. If they were to snap, I wanted to be sure that the first person they went after was someone that could snap them

out of the rage but also knew why they attacked in the first place. So far I was the only person that was able to do so, perhaps the only one that cared enough.

My family ignored it as child's play, but the wrong actions in the youth can escalate into adulthood if not stopped. They needed to be monitored, otherwise, their actions would have gotten them killed. No matter, I needed to focus on other things at that moment.

I walked back into the spare bedroom that I was granted for my visit and shut the door behind me. The sound of the door shutting alerted the dogs, lead by a small brown and black dachshund that served as the scout of the pack. Ironically, that dog was a rescue that was supposed to not bark, I guess things change when the abuse is taken away. Maybe my cousins will turn out alright, but again not my problem. I placed my loaded computer bag on sheets of the bed that sank under the weight. The softness of the bed conforms to the shape of the bag, leaving a dent in the sheets. As the laptop was removed the shape began to return to the sheets until I sat, further stretching its boundaries.

The laptop cover screeched with the dust covering the hinges, knowing that town I was in there was probably the dead cells of at least thirty people. Almost made it seem like the Dead's last resort to keeping their secrets hidden in the shadows by pulling on the one thing that gave the living a window into their worlds. Thankfully earthbound spirits of pure or neutral orientation lacked strength unless angered, only capable of

lifting objects that weigh about three pounds, otherwise, this may have been much more difficult than a quick wipe with the moist rag.

I removed the memory cards from both of the cameras and placed the emptied units on a nearby desk the stood at the very edge of the bed. The first step was inserting the card from the normal digital camera, I waited for the indication tone to sound when my computer finally recognized the data. The task was to search through the photos just to see if anything abnormal was captured.

The parts that were difficult about this part of the job was distinguishing between tricks of the mind and actual anomalies in the photographs. It is easy to call a face in the mirror a spirit to the untrained eye when it could simply be light reflecting off of streaks from the last time it was cleaned. Immediately I could notice that very effect in various photos I had taken the night, immediately disqualifying them from the roster. For the untrained or the newly awoken to the paranormal field, an easier way to tell if a face in the mirror is a natural trick of the light is to check to see if the same image appears in multiple photos, especially if they are all taken with slightly different angles. If you have any background in photography you should be able to verify this more than anyone else. Camera and lighting angles could turn an innocent baby into a giant with a few easy maneuvers. When it came to tricks of the light on

mirrors anything could turn the image of a demon into a popular celebrity if the photographer was not careful.

Another trick I needed to watch out for was the reflections of the many street signs that seemed to be tossed aside. I could never figure out how but when the flash of the camera would reflect from the sign, something about how it was made gave the appearance of strange bars of light that seemed to float in the air. The sign itself was shining as it would if the headlights of a passing vehicle were upon it. I always wondered how they were manufactured so that the reflection wouldn't blind the drivers, but with some thought, it was probably some anti-glare residue that street signs are coated in. Useful to the driver, a pain for the skilled ghost hunter that knew differently.

Other than dancing lights the main thing I was searching for the shadows that danced around me all night. These types of figures were easy to spot since the flash of the camera reacted to them as it would have if it were living people it was trying to blind. It would also no affect their appearance, so anytime a shadow was out of place or dead center in the photo, without any manipulations, it was definitely something supernatural. The same followed when looking through night vision equipment, but infrared lighting easily passed through the black material, often times the shadow figures themselves were rendered invisible. But the interesting twist was that the shadow figure's own shadow could be seen. Yes, you heard that correctly,

shadow figures can also cast shadows. Yet they could easily walk right through you if they pleased.

But to my disappointment, the camera did not register anything anomalous that I wasn't able to "debunk," as the field experts would say. I never liked the term debunking, simply because getting evidence was not "bunking." This wasn't sharing a room with a sibling, this was an investigation. But out of better terms, or by habit because of how I learned about the job, I used it.

So moving on I removed the card from my digital camera and replaced it with the one from my night vision camera. The tone on my computer sounded off for the departure and the arrival of the data on each card. Opening the file, my laptop counted seven large video files organized by times the files were created. Based on my own experiences from that night I knew that every one of those files had something that was not supposed to be there, something that would prove my stories.

I began with the first video on the list, taken just shortly after I was screamed at by an old woman. In the frame, it was hard to make out what was all in the shot due to the weak infrared lighting that came from the camera. With an adjustment of the pupils, my eyes began to make out generic shapes on the side of the snowplow that occupied the space. Minutes passed and the only activity I noticed was the LEDs fading in and out, reducing the sight of the camera. More time passed until something finally appeared. In the video,

I began to speak. “Maybe show yourself to the little video camera I have going right now,” I shouted in the video. Almost simultaneously a white object jolted into the frame for a brief second then disappeared. Quickly pause the video as soon as I noticed the figure, I noted the time stamp that read, “00:10:24.45.”

With the results in hand, I needed to open a video editing software in order to separate this finding from the rest of the video. Once opened I inserted the time stamp that held the figure into the software and set it back about ten seconds. In the reveal, each individual finding from the videos would last an average of twenty seconds, give or take how long it stayed in the frame, with a set amount of time that lead up to any manifestations. With the video I would multiply the clip at least thrice, using different effects to help bring out the appearance of the anomaly, usually slowing its duration and changing the brightness of the shot.

Once edited more features became noticeable on the figure. It strongly resembled a male figure, just slightly taller than the fridge since it was only the top part of the face that could be seen. I moved my mouse to the options bar at the top of the screen and rendered the clip into a separate file. Now I needed to follow-up with the rest of the video. Perhaps as a blessing for my first night, my wait was not long until something else came along, the smoker’s cough. It sounded different than I remembered, much lower in pitch, and sounding

like it came from a male subject. It looked like Hector was still among the world of the living after all.

Within a thirty-minute time frame, only four major anomalies were captured in the first video, out of the two and a half hours on the SD card. Two of which were detailed faces jumping in and out of the frame and random occasions, now collected as clips readied to be cut into the final reveal. But before I could move forward, the sounds of tiny paws clicking against the hardwood gave away the notion of visitors. The girls had returned.

Outside the room, I could hear the shuffle of plastic grocery bags being hauled into the kitchen. The motion of the bags strangling the groceries echoed, revealing their contents. Inside held at least two weeks worth of groceries. Chips, loafs of bread, juice powders, seasonings for dinners, typical household items that filled cupboard space for the daily use. The sound of them all reminded me of low supplies back home. I needed to go shopping. I left the bedroom and met with everyone in the kitchen.

"So Dakota are you going to stick around? We were thinking of roasting marshmallows tonight," asked my grandmother.

"No, actually I am going to head back home. I am going to need some more horsepower than what is available here to do what I need to do," I answered.

"Alright. Have fun."

My family often sounded sarcastic when I talked about my accomplishments, so often I would try to

keep quiet about them. However, my own excitement for the events would dictate opposite action, inevitably leading to the same results each time. I don't know why I stuck around, I always felt that something was going to happen that I was needed for. The vibrations I felt were screaming at me something was wrong were weak at the time, so I knew it was going to be a while.

My luggage was light so packaging up to leave took minimal timing. I did not want to stick around much longer than I needed to before trouble started to brew once again. "Dakota, why the fuck did you hit Curtis?" screamed my aunt. Too late.

"You expect me to watch over your brats that you won't control, what am I supposed to do when they start smacking each other?" I answered.

"How about letting them be boys?"

"How the hell am I supposed to do that when you won't let them outside?"

My aunt stormed into view, almost too fake reinforcements in order to confront me. Her face was blood red, she was about to blow a gasket.

"And maybe you should stop putting a diaper on Curtis, he is in middle school and would fully capable of handling himself if you would let him," I added. From the corner of my eye, I saw the look on my grandfather's face. It held a look of subtle agreements, one that needed to hide from his daughter. He had tried to tell her the same thing several times in the past, but she would never listen. "I will be leaving now."

With my computer bag in hand, I walked through the kitchen and out the back door. From behind me, I could hear the little ones trying to say goodbye, but their messages were silenced by my aunt until her youngest ran up behind me. I was stopped at the screen door when I felt a tiny hand pulling on my pant leg. I turned to see my four-year old cousin with tears beginning to form in her eyes.

"Why don't you come outside with me for a second?" I asked her.

She nodded her head, "yes" and followed me outside to a green swing seat that was on the deck. It was a bench that hung from a metal canopy-like arrangement that could fold into a bed with a few adjustments. Often times the little ones and I would relax on it during a warm summer day just to get some fresh air, whether we were going through a stressful situation or just needed some time alone, this is where you would often find us. And it was here that the sight of a little girl breaking the heart of a giant would take place.

"Why do you fight with my mom?" she asked.

"It's hard to explain Monica," I answered.

"Why?" she asked.

While trying to think of an answer she would understand, I lifted her up and set her on my lap. Monica, much like myself, was tall for her age which she would learn later in life was a bit of a disadvantage. She was going to have to grow up a bit faster than most kids, just to compensate for what she was going to have to

lose, which for the youngest child was unfair. Yet when she got older she would never realize that the term unfairly would be blessed with her brothers, which was a frightening thought. My grandfather and I were the closest that she ever really knew as father figures in her life. As for Curtis, Evan, and Monica, our grandpa was all we had for a father figure. Now that he was battling cancer, we all depended on each other so that he could focus on simply getting better. But her mother's actions often interfered by suddenly dropping three needy kids without notice. Monica needed moments like this in her life, because I feared that soon it would be taken from her. "Because sometimes people need to fight when bad things happen," I said, trying to answer her.

"But my teacher said that fighting is bad," she replied.

"Well your teacher is right, but fighting sometimes causes good things to happen."

"How?"

"You know how sometimes your brother's get into fights, but after they are done they act like it never happened?"

"Yeah."

"Well, the reason they do that is that fighting is sometimes the only thing that makes bad things go away."

"Really? So what is bad about my mom?"

I wanted to answer Monica, but in truth, the answer was complex, much more than the mind of a four-year old could understand. The poor child was allergic to nearly every known food item and more, on top of being an asthmatic, so her mother tried to keep her quarantined inside regardless of what she was advised to do.

Both doctors and family alike tried to get my aunt to understand that in order to get rid of some of the allergies, Monica needed to be exposed, then after extensive monitoring, her doctor would eventually eliminate a majority of the problem. Yet we might as well have pried every tooth out of her mouth, cause it took a lot in order to get what was needed to be done.

After a second or two something clicked inside my mind that would help Monica understand. “You know how you are allergic to a lot of things, so your mom doesn't let you do a lot?” I asked her.

“Yeah,” she replied with a hint of curiosity.

“Well, there is actually a way to get rid of some of those allergies.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, and can you guess what it is?”

“My mom has to let me do that stuff?” she guessed with an evil grin on her face.

“You got it.”

Monica was actually very smart for her age. I often guessed that some of her brains were hidden by the thick curls that rested on her head. She was a child of

mixed races, and her hair was some of the curliest I have seen. Tiny loops that could trap an entire cargo plane if she wasn't careful. Everyone had to be careful when they would rub her head since her hair liked to grab onto anything that intruded. Don't let the cuteness fool you, her hair also held in temper and just plain evil. But something about that little girl always managed to fool me. "Anyway, I got to go. Be good okay?" I told her. Before she answered she lunged forward and hugged me around the neck.

"I love you, Koda," she said.

"I love you too kiddo," I answered.

I gave Monica one last squeeze before setting her down. She knew I had to go, but something about her gave me the feeling that she was worried. Either something she heard while at preschool or something her mother told her that she didn't quite understand made her upset every time I would leave. Needless to say, it bothered me, not because of what she was told, but because it distorted a promise I made her a long time ago. The promise? It was to always be there for her no matter what happened. A promise I made to my brothers and sisters, that I was unable to keep.

What is it about the sadness that makes the hands of time push back its own sand? What was going on that made space itself seem to grow? Was it the lenses inside a teardrop that did this? It seemed like a very mysterious phenomenon indeed.

As I walked over to my car, these blurs took over me, almost as if I were in a drunken trance. I could still see everything, but every acted as if it couldn't see me. It felt like something was trying to remove me from this realm. The sounds around me began to fade as well. I feared for what could have been happening to me. So to avoid crashing down I hurried into my car, sliding my computer bag into the floorboard just under the glove box on the passenger side and tried to rest before I drove away. I laid my head back on the seat to try to relax. Next, to me, where my vest sat, I felt a little girl near me.

"Daddy? What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing, Baby Girl," I answered holding back tears.

"Is it about Monica?" she asked.

"No, I am just worried that something really bad is going to happen really soon that is going to hurt a lot of people."

"I know. Is there anything I could do to make you feel better?"

I looked over to the passenger seat to look my little girl in the eye. There was something that she could do to get my mind off of it all. "Could you tell me who your mommy is?" I asked her.

She smiled, "You already found her. She will let you know when she is ready."

I secretly hoped for a more specific answer, but it was enough of a pleasant start. "Really? Does she know too?" I asked, so I could prepare.

"She knows just as much as you do Daddy. They won't let me tell you anything else yet."

"Who?"

"Mommy's friend."

Olivia looked away as if something caught her attention. "She is calling me," she said.

"Wait, are you in trouble?" I asked worried about the safety of my daughter.

"Don't worry Daddy. I'll be back in a little bit."

I tried to think of more to say, but Olivia had disappeared once again before I could do so.

"The things I deal with for the women in my life," I whispered.

After my daughter had faded into the divide once again I started up the car and drove away. Obviously, my presence was a bother, and I hate to take up more time than what was needed. The only reason I stayed was to help my grandfather with the kids, now that their so-called mothers have returned I was no longer needed. Perhaps on the way home, I would run into someone that would not take my presence for granted.

The canyon always had a poetic view during any given afternoon in the spring. Something about that time of day always made it feel like a backward trip through time. The sagebrush, occasional wildlife, the distant sounds of fish surfacing in the river below, all of it whispered songs that felt like the stories grandparents would tell their kin. Often times I wondered if this was how it felt back when there was no technol-

ogy to compromise the personal connections between strangers, back when everybody knew their neighbors. Sometimes this was how I envisioned how a post-apocalyptic world would be seen once humanity was somehow removed from the ranks, and I was the lone survivor. Murtaugh served as an unsung reminder to both these notions. A place time forgot, and a place nature remained. Regardless of what the people residing there believed, it would not be hard to wipe the town clean from existence. All it would take was the schools getting destroyed.

I was reminded of these images nearly every time I would visit. Many would probably try to imagine other fates for the town, but given my violent history there, what I would see would also be my hopes. The people there tried to beat on me like a punching bag, they even tried pelting me with random rocks from the playground. They tried to hurt me, but would only be fascinated by the face the rocks would just bounce right off of my body.

Twenty minutes passed until I was back in town. Amour Trahison Perte, the hell hole in which I lived, was much like Oublé in the sense of how people treated one another. Here people hated everybody and believed the first thought to come to mind was the truth. Nobody ever bothered to dig into the problem, they all just assumed the worst was on the surface. The school district took this same code into their methods of punishment, along with a few hints of favoritism

to those who gave the school monetary benefit. Soon they would earn a proper reward for their negligence. My only fear for these schools is that somebody I cared about was going to be in the line of fire.

On the outskirts of town, about three miles from my place during road construction was a one-stop supermarket that I had a member's card for. While living by myself, these cards became useful to save a few bucks. I made a better living than most people in the state, but I tried to keep enough funds stocked up just in case of emergency. Call me paranoid but knowing my family's medical history and common circumstances of bad luck, I did the right thing. The worst tends to happen when people don't wire their own safety net, just to cover their ass in case they trip.

The parking lot was nearly full, barely any spots available near the door. I guess one can attribute it to the growing laziness in this country. I didn't care about parking toward the far back of the lot. Once I found a spot parked closest to the exit and parked my car, I jumped out in order to stretch my legs. The car I had didn't satisfy the legroom of a growing oversized teenager, which became obvious once my size started to shift on a daily basis and my knees started to come higher than the dashboard in rushed situations. I was looking into getting a truck sometime soon, but the money became a problem.

I had what I needed, don't get me wrong, but something kept telling me I should wait. Thankfully, my

mother had tried to cram me in several, and I mean several, tight spots when I was growing up so adjusting myself wasn't an issue on most days.

When I locked my car and faced the store I noticed a familiar sight, a girl with long black hair walking next to who appeared to be her mother. My thoughts about her identity might have seemed obvious at the time, but from the angle, I spotted her, it was hard to tell if they were correct. I needed to get closer, so I hurried into the store while trying to avoid getting hit by a car. Somehow, despite my height, it was a difficult task that day.

I walked through the automatic sliding doors of the store to immediately scan the visible area. I looked at the various items in sight hoping to see her, but with no results. But with hopes that she was still in the store, I grabbed a cart to begin grocery shopping. In my mind, I kept a list of everything I was needing, but just in case I would walk around through the entire store just to be sure.

I walked over to a hallway in the store that carts were hidden. A woman struggling with both a hyperactive little boy and a latched cart stood in the way. As I moved closer to the mother and son I started to hear something out of place, a heartbeat that didn't match the rest. It was a slow beat, almost as if it was fresh. While moving closer to the woman the solo heartbeat grew stronger. It was close but seemingly had no source. The woman continued to struggle with the cart

as the child grew louder. "Would you like some help with that?" I asked.

"Yes, please! Thank you," said the relieved woman.

I placed both of my hands on the conjoined carts and jerked them apart. A deformity in the plastic had caused a bulge in the cart that gripped others of its kind. "There you go," I said passing the cart along.

"Thank you again," she said.

A strand of hair had danced on her face during the struggle that she gently moved back over her head revealing a tired face. She was a good-looking blonde gal, but her kid dragged her out almost like a rag doll. The young man was hidden away behind his mother's leg.

"Too bad more guys aren't like you," she said glancing over to a nearby cart pusher.

"Well, I try to be one of the better ones," I said with a smile. The woman blushed as she walked away. The boy, now with his fingers wrapped in between the gaps of the shopping cart, watched me closely as they moved farther away. Then I noticed the camouflage patterns on his clothes which gave me an idea on what to do to help his mom out. "You keep your mother safe, got it, soldier?" I said. The boy giggled then jumped when his mother suddenly stopped and placed her hand on her stomach.

"Are you okay mom?" asked the boy.

"Yeah I am okay, your sister keeps kicking me though," answered his mother.

The mother shook her head and continued walking as best as she could. The conversation between her and her son slowly faded, but I had heard enough to understand the situation. Once again my hidden abilities surfaced.

One of the many tricks I have used since I was a small child was a psychic ultrasound. For some reason whenever I am near a pregnant woman, I start to hear the heartbeat of her unborn child. Then within fractions of a second, I actually begin to see the child as you would on the newer four-dimensional ultrasounds. I hardly ever revealed that I could do this simply out of fear of execution.

I grabbed the cart that was stuck to the original one and began moving through the aisles. The aisles were piled with several parents trying to squeeze in groceries around hyper children. Frustration danced liked the aromas of cheap candles, crushing its partner's feet with every sway making simply walking around to the store difficult. I tried to move through, but about every third row I ended up kissing carts. Finally, in the frozen aisles, I found what I had been looking for in the entire store, the girl with long black hair. She had been trying to jump to get a better reach for a box of mini corn dogs on the top shelf that her fingers barely touched the edge of. I pushed my cart over to the far opposite aisle, remarkably the only one that was clear in the store and sneaked up behind her. "Here, let me get that for you," I said.

"Oh, thank you," she said backing away a few feet. I reached for the box that she had tried to reached for and brought it down to her level. As I handed her the box, her eyes lit up. "Dakota!" she squealed.

"Surprise! I happened to be passing through and thought you could have used a little help," I said with a slight grin.

"I am glad that you did. When I couldn't reach it I start thinking of you," said Shandra with a shade of red blooming on her face.

"I hope that is a good thing."

"It is," she giggled. She then peered around me to see a cart full of various items. "Is that your cart?" she asked.

"Yeah, I am just grabbing some stuff for my house."

"Oh really? Where are your parents?"

I wasn't sure how to answer the question because of how many levels in complexity it resided in. So I just brought up the simplest form of the truth I could think of. "I, uh, actually live by myself," I answered. By the look on Shandra's face, I could tell she heard the worry in my voice.

"Really? Where do you live?"

"I actually live in the large gray house on Eastlake, the one across from the cemetery."

"Oh yeah, I have seen you around there before. But how can you afford to live there by yourself? It's a pretty shitty economy and hardly anybody can hold together their own life."

"Well, I helped with a few projects in areas above what the recession is affecting."

"You're lucky. Maybe I can come by sometime?"

"Sure, I got no problem with it. I have plenty of room."

"Cool."

From around the far corner, near the front of the store, an older woman that vaguely resembled Shandra appeared. "Shandra I got the... who is this?" she asked.

"Oh hey, mom. This is my friend Dakota, the one I told you about from school," Shandra answered.

"Oh yeah, you weren't kidding. He is huge."

I reached out my hand to properly greet Shandra's mother. "It's nice to meet you," I said.

"Likewise Mr. Frandsen. And please call me Ramona," she said reaching out to my hand. The moment friction buzzed our palms something changed in Ramona's eyes shifting her glare from kind mother to startled momma bear. She wrapped her fingers around my hand and shook like she would any other person, but the muscles in her hand were tighter than an average greeting. This woman was mad about something. She tilted her head slightly to the side and said, "Shandra please head back over to the produce, I think I forgot the tomatoes for salad tonight."

"But mom," Shandra gently cried.

"Just go do it," forced her mother.

Shandra hesitated to complete her mother's orders until I gave a slight nod letting her know I was alright.

In truth, I was a little nervous, but I have stared into the eyes of the devil before. Ramona fixed her eyes on mine as if ready to slice me open as she slowly tightened her grip. "Alright big boy, what exactly are you planning on doing with my daughter?" she asked through her teeth.

It was obvious that she had used this technique on guys that were tempted by her daughter in the past. The look in her eyes and lack of hesitance said enough for me to understand. It also gave me a way to break through the barriers. "For right now I am just trying to be a friend," I answered.

"Sure, that is what they all say. I cannot let my little girl be with some scumbag, after all, she has been through. What makes you different?" she asked.

After I had answered she tightened her grip as a method of public interrogation. She was expecting me to break, but she was unaware of the times I held a woman's hand during childbirth during more incidents of unlucky timing. It was a miracle that my hand didn't burst then, so there was nothing she could do to make it do so now.

"I am one of the oldest of thirty-nine children, which after endless hours of babysitting gave me enough motivation to avoid having sex as much as possible," I replied. My answer was more than her mind could handle, but regardless of what she thought it was the truth, which served as the crowbar, I needed to pry my hand free of Ramona.

"Really? How the heck did that happen?" she asked.

"In short, too many people knocking on the neighbor's door late at night. Trust me I just barely found out about thirty-two of them, with very good odds that even more are out there."

"Wow. How do I know that you're not lying?"

"Because just before I met your daughter, I met my long-lost sister that is just two months younger than me. Even though I haven't told a lot of people, Shandra knows who she is, but she doesn't know the full story."

"Oh."

Ramona has eased her stature once she realized I had other things on my mind that didn't involve sleeping with every girl in sight. I could have ended it here, but there were two more tricks up my sleeve for the grand finale. "And while I still have your attention there is another thing you should know about me," I said lighting the first fuse to the fireworks.

"What is that?" she asked with a tone of near guilt.

"I know several cops in the area that I have helped with on several occasions. If something were to happen to your daughter I could make that I will, personally make sure they used everything to find her and put down the sick bastards that hurt her, even if it means soaking my own hands in their blood just so I could carry her home. I know I just said I was just hoping to be friends with Shandra, but in all honesty, something about her makes me pray that someday something much more would bring us together."

Ramona's eyes shifted again from anger to relief. I had passed her test. "I am going to hold you to that," she said.

"I wouldn't expect anything less," I told her. It was true, she was a single mother that worried about her teenage daughter. Knowing that I was tight with the police force, she knew I was probably one of the better guys her daughter decided to get with. Something in my voice let her know that I was being truthful to my promise. What she didn't know was how the police knew me, which I was asked to keep secret under the circumstances. Little did I know that during the finale, Shandra had been watching, listening in on words never spoken before. Once again from behind me she latched on holding me tighter than before.

"Thank you," she cried.

I turned to try to face her, but only managing to position myself like a father getting a long-awaited hug from his little girl. I glanced down to try to see her face, but my discovery turned for the worse. Underneath a black turtleneck, traces of a friction burn circled her throat. The markings were not consistent of a rope burn, but something much thicker. Shading in the marks resembled something close to a belt. Shandra was in danger. I reached into my pocket to grab a business card with my number on it.

"Here, take this," I told her.

She lifted her head and grabbed the card with her hand while asking, "What is it?"

"My card," I answered, "If you need help with anything, or just someone to talk to, don't be afraid to get a hold of me. Day or night, I will always answer."

The card was one of many I had made in order to promote my paranormal team. The design was a prototype I made from a website template that only mentioned my name, my website, and my number. It was my first thought to be careful about who I shared these with, just to avoid fraudulent calls.

But in this case, somebody needed my help. I could tell Shandra was in danger, she was just needing someone to reach out to her. If she was troubled, I knew to listen. If she was harmed, I knew a monster greater than the classic Jekyll and Hyde that could break her free. Shandra needed to see that, cause that mark around her neck was fresh and looked like it was actually done with several applications.

"Thank you," she said while tearing up. She needed to see somebody willing to fight for her at the drop of a dime. As she walked over to her mother I could hear the whispering noting it is best to hide the card. Both of them were in danger. My Shadow Hunter began to see the bruises faded in time, now revealed for the executioner. Somebody was deserving of a visit from hell hounds, but I needed to be sure. As Shandra and Ramona walked to the registers I walked back over to my cart to do the same. Perhaps I could read more into the situation.

The store lacked self-check outs but held enough kind cashiers to talk to during the transactions. I skimmed through the open lanes and found a woman that resembled an old friend's grandmother. I entered her lane and started setting my groceries on the belt.

"Didn't you go to Jefferson Elementary?" she asked me.

My face was in shock that it was, in fact, the woman was the grandmother of my old friend Cherry, who I hadn't seen since the sixth grade.

"Hey Mrs. Rowan, long time no see!" I said with a chuckle.

"Oh my god, Dakota? I almost didn't recognize you!"

"Yeah, I guess I might have changed a bit since the last time you saw me."

"No kidding, how tall are you now?"

"Uh, about six foot five last time I checked."

"Already? I knew you were going to be big but damn!"

"Seems to be the word on the street. Anyway, how is Cherry doing?"

"Oh dear, you didn't hear," she said with tears trying to form. I was officially worried about this reunion turning sour.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"She is in a coma. Did you hear about the large crash near McCall that was on the news about two months ago?"

"Yeah, it was caused by some seventeen-year old that only cared about the fact he could stick his tongue through his cheek after it all happened. I heard that the girl that was hit got flown over to the hospital in critical condition but they never released whether or not she made it. That was her?"

"It was, she was in horrible condition. She had lost both of her legs in the crash. The doctors are doing everything they can to make sure she makes it but they are starting to lose hope."

"Oh my god."

When the news had set their charges around my eardrums I walked away with my hand covering my forehead. Cherry was a very good friend of mine back in elementary school when I was bullied a lot by other kids because of my size. She had been bullied as well because she had hit puberty a lot earlier than other girls. Being a guy I didn't fully understand what she went through. But I did understand, perhaps a little too well, that the treatment she received was unfair. We both had matured at early ages both in physical and mental way, which turned us into outcasts. Because of everything that happened we became real close until she moved away when we were about the age of twelve.

From behind I could hear Mrs. Rowan, "She told me that you guys kept in touch online."

By then I began to cry, and who could blame me? My old friend was a prisoner inside her own body and was likely to not come out. "Yeah, we made a promise

to find a way to still be able to see each other the day she heard about the move," I said trying to hold back.

"I figured that out when she would start giggling nonstop after being on the computer. She looked forward to talking to you every day. To be honest because of everything I thought that someday you two would get married," she laughed.

I laughed at the images that appeared in my head when Cherry's grandmother told me her vision. "How did you come to that conclusion?" I asked trying to mask worry with old feelings.

"After one day when you two were about seven I accidentally caught Cherry acting out a wedding. When I asked her who the groom was, she giggled and said your name. Ever since then when she would come over to stay the night, I always heard her say the words, 'Dakota I love you,' in her sleep. I guess because of how often she would say it, I figured that someday her wish would come true," she said while ringing up my groceries.

When I heard what Mrs. Rowan recalled about Cherry, tears of sadness no longer flowed from my eyes, but rather tears of bliss. Knowing that I was the cause of her happiness I felt relieved about the pain she had been through in my absence.

"Hun, I know that you aren't religious, but can I ask you to please pray for her tonight? Maybe something from you will help her make it through."

Prayer, a method ridiculed by the masses which held miraculous power if done under generous decisions. Scientific measures were just barely realizing that prayer, and other spiritualistic methods actually had very powerful effects. Like the old woman had said before I am not exactly religious but even from me prayers could do some extraordinary things. "I will don't worry," I answered.

"Good. Your total is sixty-six dollars and sixty cents," she said.

"Great, thanks for the warning," I joked while sliding my prepaid debit card through the system.

"You aren't going to grab some gum to change it?" she asked in a confused tone.

"Nope, I just found out a friend of mine is in danger. That just lets me know I need to get ready to kick in some doors."

"Be careful, Dakota," said while handing me my receipt.

"Don't worry I am not the one hellfire is wanting to burn," I said while grabbing my cart now full of plastic grocery bags filled with various items and a tub of ice cream. The bag boy noticed that I was ready for a gunfight and tucked himself closer the register to avoid getting run over. A smart move on his part.

Anytime the number "666" would appear I immediately would take it as a warning for approaching misfortune from the cosmos. Whenever those particular number would appear something bad always followed,

but often times the numbers come in the most ironic ways that go missed until some conspiracy theorist would notice the pattern. I myself was guilty of these thoughts, but all in good reason. For this occasion, I was aware of an approaching battle that was brewing not too far from where I was going.

Outside of the store, I watched Shandra and her mother hurry to load their groceries into their car. In the front seat was a large male figure with what looked like tattoos that nearly blended into the tinted windows. He was shouting to the top of his lungs. I walked closer, pretending I didn't remember where I had parked, so I could mask my efforts to get more information. Shandra noticed me in the blast zone but pretended not to notice in order to protect herself. As I entered a five-foot radius around their vehicle and noticed a familiar snake tattoo that resembled what a local national guard branch would wear after getting deployed into war, I knew immediately there was no chance of this incident ending well.

I pulled out my cell phone and dialed "911" to call in a potential domestic disturbance to city dispatch. My car was positioned just far enough that the potential target would not be able to hear me, and extra insurance was in place since traffic was heavy and the sound of the motors would have masked my voice. "911 what is your emergency," read off the dispatcher.

"Dispatch this is Dakota Frandsen, I need to report a possible domestic disturbance as well as possible as-

sault on a minor that will quickly escalate soon," I said trying to remain calm.

"Alright Dakota, I have your location. Can you tell me what is going on?"

"I will after I get you to run a plate for me."

"Dakota I am not able to give you that information."

"Listen! I am not looking for names I am just looking to see if we have a former national guardsman involved. My CI code seventy-nine, delta, bravo, Juliet, Romeo, twenty-four."

"Alright I ran your name through, looks like you are in luck."

"I hope so. The plate I need you to run is two, tango, twelve, five, zeta, alpha. See if one of the names on the register belongs to a former national guardsman. Hurry."

Over the phone, I could hear the dispatcher running the plate through a local database. The clicks of the keyboard might as well be running off of firecrackers for how fast they moved. Finally, a tone that indicated a result echoed on the phone. On my end of the line, I pretended that I was talking with family and putting away groceries while watching out my target out of the corner of my eye. When Shandra and Ramona emptied the cart, they abandoned it in another parking space and hurried into the vehicle. As they drove off I could hear the dispatcher adjusting her headset so she could give me the results of her search. "I have the names pulled up, the vehicle belongs to a couple here in Twin

Falls and the husband is former military, Army National Guard to be exact. The house on their driver's licenses have been reported for several domestics within the last forty-eight hours but responders found no evidence of assault, but they noted that their teenage daughter showed some signs of aggression," she told me.

"Fucking shit. Check to see if the husband has police connections, perhaps a relative in uniform, something along the lines of a brother or even a close cousin. The daughter has burn marks around her neck that looked like somebody much larger than she tried to choke her to death with a belt and by what I just witnessed another ugly ass fight is on the way," I ordered the dispatcher.

More keyboard clicks rattled off on the other end of the line as I returned the cart to a nearby metal stall full of others. From the metal stall, I used the car remote to unlock my vehicle so I could ready myself for a death march. The sound of a hand rubbing against a microphone crawled through the line.

"Yes, one of the first responders was the husband's brother. If you want cops involved the officer is not working right now," she had told me.

"Good, is officer Jerome on duty?" I asked.

"Yes but his shift is almost over."

"I need you to make sure he is a first responder to this one. The daughter goes to the school that he works, I also go to that school that is how I know the

young girl. She is in danger. Right now they are mobile in a blue, four-door sedan heading southbound on Madison Street heading towards the library. Possibly heading home cause they just got groceries."

"Alright, we will send responders to their home. Do you have anything else to add?"

"Yes, if the daughter needs to get away tell the officers to give me a call. I have plenty of room and I just got enough groceries to last a month."

"Dakota you know we cannot legally do that."

"I know. She has my card, and Jerome will know what to do with it."

Out of frustration for the dispatcher, I snapped my phone shut and started the car. The dispatcher on the other end, while she may just be doing her job, was getting annoying. I was trying to save someone's life but was being blocked by the pathetic technicalities. It is one thing to have rules, but the rules to certify one to save the life are boundaries that hold back so many from doing the right thing. But the appropriate thing to do in that moment was to wait for the boys in blue to see the problem before I could dissect the issue without it escalating into undesired territory. I didn't want to kill anybody, but a testosterone frenzy might not have left me with any choice. If somebody was going to die that day it needed to be at the hands of an officer. I needed to wait until my armies saw the flares on the horizon before I could sound off the charge. Too many casualties would have resulted.

I left the parking lot and made my way into the street, almost causing a wreck inside of the intersection. This part of town was literally responsible for a majority of vehicular deaths because of people's lack of attention. Many children have died on this road just trying to get home from the high school because the routes they would take lacked any method to cross legally. The unfortunate truth is that driver's hardly stopped for the pedestrian. Even the tallest of students would have had to pull off walking across moving cars in order to get home safely. Thankfully I had a car to avoid those problems.

My house was about a half a mile away from the store, but the second largest intersection was under construction since March and crews hardly had anything done. Having to take a back route I hurried to my house so I could have tucked away my groceries before my guest arrived. Not many people traveled these roads during the daylight hours unless it was to mend an emergency at home. One of the many simple facts that allow those in power to think of the people as nothing but bees going about their business until they meet their demise.

When the screech of old tires met the gravel driveway, I was greeted by a couple stray Shar Pei puppies that occasionally wandered around here. They knew that coming around here, they would get food and occasional shelter if the weather was bad. These dogs, even though they were just a few months old, were very

intelligent. After a tour of a gated backyard, they knew right where to go if they were in the need of something. For the winters and rain, they would tuck themselves under a few old blankets in a heated shed that was in my backyard that I had renovated just for them. Since there were several abusive and neglectful, I was visited frequently by lost pets alike. Many have tried to label me as a hoarder because the animals would spread the word out about a salvation and many would come, but my various unknown connections managed to have me put as nothing more than a good Samaritan that helps out small animals.

As long as they never attacked a person or each other, it was never a problem. The reason was the hidden kindness that lies within all hearts, and for that many amazing things could be seen here. Snakes that played a game of tag with a puppy. Kittens that would sing along with the birds. Perhaps the most amazing, seeing a dog that held scares from its past torture give away a blanket to another that was pregnant. Many lives were changed, helped, saved, and even begun here. I made this place to serve as a home and a sanctuary for all that entered.

From the corner of my eye, I could see the Shar Pei pups taking turns playing with a large rubber ball that the other has left behind. They had not a care in the world, and went on like this was their home. I always enjoyed seeing that, knowing that somehow my soul was cleansed for helping another creature of this Earth.

Perhaps it was something that was needed to be seen by my dear friend.

As I hurried in and out of my house while putting groceries away, a ringtone from my phone played, indicating that a text message was received. When the last pack of noodles, and thankfully the last item just bought, was stored in the top cupboard I pulled out my phone to check the message. "Officer Jerome," read the display. Pressing the SEND button I opened the text in order to reveal its contents.

"Just got a call from dispatch. Said you wanted me at a case, why?" asked the officer.

I began typing, "The girl involved is a victim of a police cover-up, is being abused by her father, and is a fellow student at your school."

Minutes later a reply appeared. Much later than the usual. "I hate when you're right. Can you come and get her?" he asked.

"Just send me the address and I'll be there in five."

As my phone locked itself up I hurried outside, only securing the bottom lock on my front door. I unlocked the doors to my car when the phones signaled for another message. When I was in the car I cracked open the flip-phone to reveal the message.

"Seven, thirteen, main street," I quietly read off.

Shandra's house was located just across the street from the public library. I knew right where she was this whole time without even realizing it. But her location was a small fraction of my worries at that point, it was

whether or not she was okay that had me worried the most. My tires soon knew that there was trouble for how loud they screamed while coming out of the driveway and onto the main road.

Car on the roads had diminished in quantity on the roadways allowing for speed to take over my ride without worry of any damage. Any hill that came into our path might as well have been runways at the airport for how many times my car went airborne. From the other cars, I could hear the tones from the keypads of other cell phones signaling for emergency vehicles. In the passenger seat, my demonic counterpart emerges.

"Can you take out the cell phones?" I asked him.

"That and more," he said with the devilish grin.

"No deaths got it?"

"Don't worry, there are too many kids on the way."

"Than get it done. Turn it off when we get there."

My Shadow Hunter flew through the roof in a veil of darkness. Another trick in our bag that we had been developing for a while would mimic the effects of an electromagnetic pulse just in case we needed to cloak ourselves in radio silence. The only difference was we could turn it off. Dark lightning struck the other vehicles disabling all functions to their engines and phones. I would be without interruption until the moment the bumpers hit the curb in front of Shandra's house. My ETA to Jerry about my arrival was about to be halved. If only actual police response was this fast.

Minutes passed when I finally spotted the police lights in the reflections of the library windows. I spotted three police cruisers, one of which contained an attack dog, parked on the grass in front of the house. Police tape was being strung around the property to secure the premises. I parked my car behind one of the cruisers and jumped out of my car. At the sound of the car door slamming, a bone-thick officer met me at the police line. He sticks his arm out in an attempt to hold me back.

"Sir, we can't let you across," he said.

"Get Officer Jerome out here!" I shouted. I know the officer had no clue who I was, but I did not have the time to argue with him.

From inside the house, I could hear a familiar voice shout, "It's alright Cortez, I called him here."

Officer Cortez kept his hand held out as he turned to face a broken doorway that leads into the secured house. I watched through the windows to see Jerry with his arm around a female figure. Jerry was a man that was close to my stature. Seeing him hold on to the girl must have been appeared similar to what the next few moments when she would be in my arms would look like.

As he emerged the female was revealed to be a bruised Shandra that tucked her head into a police officer's jacket. The burns around her neck had become darker since I last saw the. Her eyes cried tears of blood. Every part of her body I could see was now beaten to

a literal black, blue and bloody image. It was a miracle that I was able to recognize her. She lifted her head up after Jerry gave her a tap on the shoulder to let her know I had arrived. When she looked at me the fear in her eyes was nearly hypnotizing, I couldn't believe it.

I knew she was in trouble, but seeing the intensity of her battle first hand where she couldn't try to hide it away brought on new levels of every thought that ran through my head.

"Are you sure?" asked Cortez.

Jerry walked Shandra over a few steps before she nearly flew into me. Her arms gripped me even tighter than before, nearly breaking my neck. The sight nearly startled everyone that was on scene, and thankfully gave Cortez his answer. Both officers that had been monitoring us glanced at each other.

"Never mind then," said Cortez with a sigh of relief.

"Why don't you move along? I need to talk with these two real quick before med-units arrive," said Jerry while placed his hand on Cortez's shoulder.

"Yeah, I'll go see what the hold-up is."

Cortez brushed the hand off his shoulder then walked over to his cruiser to radio dispatch. I gently placed my hand around Shandra to avoid hurting her anymore. She turned her head to face Jerry while leaning on my chest. Jerry tucked his thumbs underneath his belt as he readied to talk.

"So what's the situation?" I asked.

"She and her mom got beat up pretty bad, I think that both will be okay but we need have med-units examine both before they leave the scene. Can you hold out? I know you probably have some things to look through from your last case."

"Yeah, I can stay for as long as I am needed."

"You might be here for a while."

Officer Cortez waved his hand towards us. "Hey Jerry, can I get you to come here for a minute?"

Jerry turned and shouted, "Yeah, just hold on a second." He looked me in the eyes. "You guys going to be okay?" he asked. Shandra and I both nodded our heads. "Good," he replied.

As Jerry jogged over to Cortez, I lead Shandra over to the hood of my car so we would have a place to sit while we waited for the ambulance crew to arrive. We sat on the hood and Shandra crossed her legs over mine. "Do your legs hurt?" I asked her.

She nodded her head yes. "It hurts when you hold me," she whispered.

"I am sorry."

"It's okay. I just wish that was all that it was."

"You and me both."

Shandra dug herself farther into my chest. I felt a slight shiver from her that slithered its way onto my arms. As I tried to focus the warmth of my body onto her, I closed my eyes to shut off all of my senses except for hearing and touch. The girl in my arms was hurt, she needed to be healed. I managed to establish a

connection into her mind, one much stronger than before, in order to get a better look at where she was hurt. I tried to imagine all of her injuries slowly disappearing as if they had never existed in the first place.

Sounds of the ambulance sirens awoke me from the trance I was in. The rest of the world tuned away from me as I tried to mend Shandra's wounds to a much more tolerable trouble she was painted with. The paramedics walked up to Jerry to get an idea of the situation, which quickly ended with Jerry waving me towards the ambulance. "Can you get up?" I asked Shandra.

"No," she replied.

"Okay. The paramedics are finally here. They need to make sure that you're okay before I can take you out of here."

"Please carry me."

"I will."

I forced myself upward from the hood of my car. As I stood the car moaned in celebration of a vanished weight that was lifted off of it. The cement of the sidewalk felt like a cooling fire underneath the soles of my shoes with each step I took moving closer the ambulance. From inside the house, I could see Shandra's mother slowly watching me as I carried her daughter across guarded path. Both were no longer in danger once one of them broke free. Setting Shandra on the metal tailgate, I allowed for the paramedics to examine her. Both of them were short Hispanic females with

their hair tied up. The stress of a long day was apparent when seeing their faces that almost looked like they had aged ten years within a ten-hour time frame.

I made sure to say close to the ambulance so Shandra could know her ticket away from this mess was still valid. As the paramedics started to sign a light into Shandra's eyes, I asked my Light Hunter to take a few moments to heal her.

He stuck to her side, without being noticed by anyone else, and used his hands to shine a bright white light on Shandra. This granted her enough strength to pass all of the tests the medical units would utilize to fully understand her condition, temporarily masking it as nothing more than a few bumps and bruises. My focus was taken when I felt a finger give me a tap on the shoulder. I turned to face who was trying to get my attention. It was Jerry signaling with his finger that he needed to speak with me.

We walked a few feet away from the ambulance, my guess at the time was to mask a conversation that would turn Shandra uneasy. Stopping on a sidewalk pathway that leads into the house Jerry turned towards me with a stressed look nearly plastered to his face.

Jerry was a taller guy with a heavy build to him. His hair reminded me of a stereotypical military buzz cut that he had styled to make himself appear more intimidating. Despite his figure, he was actually a big softy. When the job hadn't been on his mind he was typical down-to-earth guy.

But a few months ago I witnessed a change in him. He had asked me to personally intervene when his teenage daughter started having hallucinations after coming home from middle school with bruises on her arm. The “episodes,” as he described them, often involved conversations with dead relatives. After a few sessions, I was able to uncover that she was attacked by a boy from school. Jerry made sure that the boy was serving a full sentence. Inevitably, seeing how well it all turned out, Jerry suggested that we form a sort of shadow net between us. He would have me come in on a case he felt was slipping through the cracks of the legal system and use my supernatural connections to expose hidden truths the police were unable to see to help get the suspects behind bars. In return, I asked for Jerry to pull some strings whenever I managed to tail some suspicious activity I uncovered while on my cases in order to save those the police never knew about. It was a very risky and complex system, but somehow we managed to make it work.

“Dakota, are you sure you want to take on this case?” he asked.

“You asked me that when we pushed your daughter’s case. What do you think my answer is going to be?” I replied.

“This case is different. The guy is an old National Guardsman! He gets pushed through people will notice.”

"I am pretty sure the moment that his superiors get word of this, there will charge added to the case that will bring him down. Forensics managed to get the photos of Shandra's marks before I healed her, right?"

"Yes, but..."

"But nothing. Make sure that those are the photos that they see, case closed."

"No case not closed! What the hell am I supposed to do in order to excuse that somebody who is not a relative taking her into the damn social workers? Cause they are about to get here any minute now and you know how fucking bullheaded most of them are!"

"Try to put forward that this would be the only way for her to not miss out on school. If there is any resistance I will put forward a little persuasion," I said giving my head a couple gentle taps. Jerry's eyes nearly leaped from their sockets to attempt to smack me upside for even speaking of such an outrageous idea.

"Are you nuts? You can't just do that to people!" he forced.

"I am not going to force her to do anything. I am just going to charm an ideal solution. All it will take is to convince them that Shandra's safety and well-being will be better kept this way than any other alternative. Then they will check my file and see that I am a criminal informant that specializes in these types of cases. Everything will be just fine."

"I hate it when you get like this. It freaks me out every time," he said gritting his teeth.

"I know, but how many times have we saved the day because of it?" I asked joking about our past.

"Yeah, yeah, shut up. Regardless of what we have done in the past, you need to be careful, I don't need you getting compromised because of Florence Nightingale Syndrome."

"It doesn't count if I already had feelings for her beforehand."

"What about her? What if she starts developing feelings for you?"

"If that happens then we have the perfect opening for her to come to one of us for help as soon as something comes up."

"Dakota, I am not saying you two shouldn't get romantically involved. I am just saying that you need to find a way to separate yourself otherwise you will only end up getting yourself killed if something happens."

Another couple of taps gently alert my shoulder when I tried to continue the banter between myself and Jerry. Catching a quick glimpse of his face, Jerry gave away the fact that it was someone that held the most influence to this case than anyone else. Slowly turning around to see who it has, I was surprised to see that it was Shandra who had walked on her own just to see us.

"Hey. How did it go?" I asked her.

"Fine, they just said that I should just take it easy for a few days," she said.

"Good. That can easily be arranged," I said glancing towards Jerry.

"What do you mean? What is gonna happen now?" she asked.

"We are going to place you under protective custody. At least for a couple weeks while the investigation continues," said Jerry.

"A couple weeks?" shrieked Shandra, "I don't want to go to some foster home for a couple weeks, the people there could be much worse!"

"I know, I know. But we have an arrangement that would benefit everyone, even though in most cases it would be impossible to pull off. You will be staying with a close partner of mine here in town. That way you won't miss anything at school and you won't have to worry about getting moved around the state. Plus if you ever run into trouble, I'd much rather prefer that you would be around him than anyone else. He will take care of you."

"What do you mean? Who is it?"

Giving Shandra a playful two-fingered wave, I let her know that I was the one Jerry had been mentioning. The logic behind his words rang true. I have been known for a short-temper and getting protective of a select few thus making me a much more valued guardian for Shandra and Jerry knew it. He knew that if she was ever harmed I would always be one of the first to go on the defense in her honor, then be able to heal any wound she received. There were limitations as

to what I could do with these abilities. But with a few adaptations, nothing could defeat me. At the news of an unsung warrior coming to her aid, Shandra naturally became full of worry.

“Dakota?” she asked.

“I figured that coming with me would be a more favorable outcome to all of this,” I answered.

“Are you sure?” she asked, “I wouldn’t want to impose.”

“It is no imposition. I made a promise to always answer your call, this is one of those answers. There is plenty of everything for both of us at my place.”

“So... you’re serious?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Thank you. Not a lot of guys would do that for a girl they just met.”

As my mouth attempted to open, Officer Jerry interrupted in a rush. “I hate to interrupt this lovey-dovey moment, but the social workers are on their way and they will try to tear apart our arrangement. So Shandra, why don’t you get about two weeks worth of stuff packed up?” he ordered.

Shandra gave no argument and simply replied, “Alright. But can you come with me, Dakota?”

“Sure thing,” I answered.

Shandra reached out her hand with her palm facing towards the sky. She held it out in expectations of a gift. In retrospect, I worried that what I had to offer was not enough. A roof over her head, decent food, and a

sworn oath for complete protection was in my hands just for her, but I could not help but worry that it was enough. This girl was being pulled away from the very shadows that consumed her spirit, the very reasons for the fortress hidden inside her. I worried that whatever pleasantries I could provide would not be enough for her to see that the shadows made by the materials blessed with the sunlight were no agent of darkness.

But the questions that ran through my head weren't enough to hold me back from what I was doing. Gripping on to her hand, it was a leap of faith, but one much needed. There was no instruction to my job, other than doing what felt right and what was needed. The right thing to do was to come with Shandra through the ashes.

I followed Shandra through the doors of her house while observing every detail of the nearly war-torn "home." Knifes tossed into the walls, furniture tossed around, glass from the family photos coated the carpets, and walls filled with holes the size of televisions took over everything in sight. The house seemed like it witnessed its own tornado. I could hear the cracks of the broken glass underneath the feet of everyone in the house. Forensic's crews had been doing a final sweep of the place and were just walking out to put up the final barricades as Shandra lead me up a series of stairs. I tried to study the trace evidence around the stairway, starting with large blood spatter on the wall at the bottom of the stairway. Trying to picture what

had happened the images of a bloodied Shandra filled my head. From the size of the first blow and the size of the blood drips that trailed up the stairs, it was obvious that Shandra was close to death.

Upstairs the carpets became much thicker, but that was the only difference. The battle that took place in this house stayed on the first level. The drips of blood were the only sign of disruption up there. In fact, if the mess downstairs had not existed, this would only look like a desperate attempt to stop a bloody nose. Shandra then lead me to her bedroom where she finally let go of my hand to begin gathering her stuff.

Parts of a person's personality can be noticed by the way they kept their room. Disorganization often showed signs of a mind that took on much more than it was capable of handling. A clean room that was organized gave away that the owner tried their best to keep their own worlds together. To an investigator of these types of crimes seeing that the teenager kept the room cleaned was a sign of hope. A sign that the child still had a chance to do some good in the world.

Even though I wasn't an official investigator for these incidents, I became filled with that very hope. If this abuse had cycled through her family, much like it did my own, there was a chance she could be the sole heir to break all ties. A burden that would trouble her for the rest of her life.

Shandra pulled out a luggage bag with an expandable handle so she could pack up everything. Out of re-

spect for what she may pull out, I turned my back so I wouldn't see it. When I turned I noticed a photograph of much younger Shandra and another father-like figure posing on a boat. Studying the picture I began to hear a familiar grandmother-like voice in my head. "War changes everything," she whispered. She was right, war does change everything. I couldn't help but wonder who the other man was in the photo, but I couldn't bring myself to ask Shandra.

Because the nation liked to ignore the mental state of its troops and replace it with the ill-guided concept of being the "Kings of the World," so many of our men and women who return from war are often changed forever. Many times this would corrupt them, making them capable of leveling with the actions of the enemy at home. If the man in the photo was the same man I suspected of harming Shandra, I would have a feeling that was the case. But, since it was a completely different man I actually knew that at some point there was another party involved in Shandra's story. However, I didn't give it much thought at the time.

I have always had an admiration for the troops that willingly sought for help after they came back from a war zone because I knew what could happen. Little do people realize is that too many soldiers won't go seek help and end up worse than the very guys they fought. When the media caught wind of their actions, they wouldn't bother with the fact of their military status,

therefore the public would be blind when the actions of a deranged soldier emerged.

I didn't want to ask, but I needed to see if Shandra was willing to talk about what happened before I arrived. "So how did it happen?" I asked.

I glanced behind me to study her body language to read what she might have tried to hide. I wasn't expecting her to lie, but I knew there was a chance that she wouldn't want to admit to her troubles.

"Uh... my parents got into a fight, then my dad got a little rough. I tried to stop them but I only made it worse. When it kept going I hurried upstairs to call the police, but then the lady said they were already on their way so I started to freak out..." she said choking on tears.

Shandra froze as her back was turned to me. The sun froze as well in order to take the time to shine upon a wounded soul. It seemed the entire world had frozen that moment. Stars had formed on the pink walls just above a wooden dresser. It was hard to tell at the time, but angels had finally come to her side in a time of complete darkness, now illuminating a new destiny.

She turned around to face me with bloodshot eyes and waterfalls in the place of tears and slowly walked forward in my direction. Each step I noticed her body grew weaker. Then right at my feet, she collapses into a lake of tears that began to form at our feet. I dove and caught her on the sides to pull her up. She swung her arms around me as if she was holding on for dear life.

"Dakota, this is all my fault. I should have done more to stop this when this all began!" she cried out.

At the sound of her plea, tears began to emerge from my own eyes.

"Let's get you on the bed," I said while trying to avoid losing it for Shandra.

After walking her over to the twin-sized bed we both sat on its side as I laid her head against my chest right over my heart. When I felt the tears soaking through my skirt and continuing to roll down my body, I placed my left index finger just above her temple and traced tiny hearts, just to ease the pain that my powers could not take away. Moments floated away while waiting for her cries to come to an ease.

This was not your fault. None of this was ever your fault," I whispered.

The chokes of her despair had slowed. "Yes... it is," she said, "All of my family blames me for this ever since it started."

"Shandra, don't let them make you believe that. None of this was your fault."

"But I could have stopped it. I could have saved him when he came back from the war."

"There was nothing you could have done. Trust me, I know what it is like to feel guilty about the pain you see when a loved one is hurt. I know just how much you would do just to fix what has been done. And I know just how much it hurts when there is nothing you could do."

Shandra sat up and wiped off her tears. "How would you know?" she asked.

"I think that we need to get you out of here and relaxed before I can say anything," I said.

"Okay."

Shandra stood and continued packing. I stayed on her bed hunched over and wiping my own tears away. While sitting on her bed watching as she gently placed her clothes in the bag I noted everything that she packed, just in case something was to get lost. Rose colored shirts, various lotions, countless make-up, and a small stuffed polar bear with a red heart patched over its chest. Perhaps it was a comfort item from a lost childhood. I couldn't judge her because I held on to a gift from my own childhood at a time when things made a turn for the worse. The sound of the zipper returned my attention to Shandra.

"Do you have everything?" I asked.

She nodded her head, "yes" and from the look on her face, I could tell something was on her mind. Focusing on the individual threads of her irises I began to hear the words. 'I just want to leave,' whispered her mind.

"Then let's go," I said.

Shandra became shocked at my response. Her eyes nearly leaped from her head to force my probes out of her head. "How did you do that?" she asked.

"You will see soon enough," I answered.

Shandra grabbed her bag and walked to my side. Wrapping my arm around her, I pulled her close and gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead. As I pulled away the look on her face had shifted into something much deeper. Her eyes fixed solidly to mine. Her lips slowly grew in size as they merged together, yet her eyes never changed position. But in a split moment, I could not see or hear anything, with nothing more than her arms around my neck letting me know what was happening. The taste of her lips sliding over mine was intoxicating to my mind. Every thought in my mind could be felt flowing away with each gentle move. Shandra's soul was starting to shine brighter than anything the god Helios would have none, she was finally breaking free.

To tell you the truth, that was probably the best kiss I ever had. Shandra had leaped from the floor, just moments before, so she could return an ever desired moment for both of us. She locked her fingers behind my neck to hold on, nearly making herself float as I stood.

"Shall we get out of here?" I asked. Shandra nodded her head "yes" and let out a slight giggle. While giving her another kiss on the forehead I noticed a smile broke free of its constraints, one that I could have brought back with a few simple pleasant surprises down the road.

Slowly, she unlocked her hands then slid them onto my chest, as if she was looking for my heart. A search needed to check for a dying knowledge, one that shows

when genuine care is shown for another person. The search for when two hearts will begin to sing a duet. Each beat will slowly pace itself to match the other, making each other as recognizable as strands of light from the same star.

I wrapped my arm around Shandra and guided her back through the house. Once we reached the stairs she let me take the lead. I carefully looked to see a tall woman with her hair tied up and a long jacket covering most of her body standing in the front doorway. A lanyard around her neck gave away her purpose. She was a social worker there to take Shandra. Perhaps the lessons of the ancient Chinese White Snake would get a chance to bite.

I faced Shandra so I could signal for silence, then pointed towards the doorway. She glanced over in near confusion until she identified the problem for herself. The woman was there to see to it that Shandra was pushed through the system like cargo on the back of a delivery truck. Shandra was aware of what could happen if the state had its way. I couldn't let that happen. I didn't know it at the time, but she was needed for a much greater purpose.

"Let me handle her," I whispered.

"Okay," she whispered.

I walked over to the doorway in order to greet the social worker. As I came closer I could begin to hear Jerry's voice speaking to the woman. His tone almost

sounded like a brother pleading to a stubborn sister to avoid getting in trouble.

"I assure you that Frandsen is one of our most reliable resources for cases like these. He will make sure Shandra is kept safe," he said.

"I have heard of Mr. Frandsen. His name pops up in many cases that involve supernatural materials. Normally, I wouldn't allow your suggestions to be put through the system but under the circumstances, I can allow it. But before anything moves further I must know something. Why is it that he takes such a personal approach to this particular case?" she asked.

Shandra and I emerged from the door as I tucked my arms behind my back with gentle but stern shoulders. "It is because I happen to go to school with Shandra," I interrupted. The social worker turned to face me.

"It is nice to finally meet you. I have heard a lot about what you do."

"I hope that the word about me is good."

"Don't worry. Other than your behavior towards your father's case, you have a pretty good standing."

"Well, wouldn't you be a little worried about people that didn't get angry considering what he did?"

"I know, I know. It was disgusting when the test results confirmed the allegations. But are you sure you want to handle this case? There are lots of foster homes that can take care of her."

"I am sure. But if I let you start treating her like cargo, you will lose her. Plus once foster care hasn't

been linked to almost all heavy criminal offenders, then I would consider it a safe option."

"Understood. I see you are pretty locked in your decision. Be sure to take good care of her. But don't even think about trying anything, there will surveillance monitoring your house 24/7 and I will personally be coming in to inspect the premises."

"I understand, other than a couple busted door hinges that were there before I moved in you will find everything will be suitable. Now if you excuse me."

Shandra and I started to walk towards the car when I was stopped by the social worker who placed her hand on my shoulder. "I hope you know what you're doing," she whispered.

"Don't worry. You would be surprised how much people begin to trust you when they realize that you can take away their nightmares inside of hiding from them," I told her. In some sense, I was making fun of the pathetic system known as foster care. Regardless of what lawyers and judges try to say, it was extremely rare for prison cells and foster homes to actually improve anything.

She removed her hand from my shoulder, knowing it would be impossible to make me nervous about what I was doing, allowing Shandra and I to walk away from the scene. Every person around the house watched us as we walked away, frozen in a dead man's march gaze. I took Shandra's bag and slid it into the backseat. Shandra stood by the passenger side door as I walked

around. Something had jammed the handle, making it a test of strength few actually could pass. I jerked the door open holding it for my guest. She sat in the seat while laying her head back. She was obviously tired from the day she experienced.

The car nearly shrunk under my weight as I sat in the driver's seat. Sliding the key into the silver ignition, the engine roared like a lion away from a fight. The clicks of the gear stick shifted the car making it able to drive. Pressing my foot on the gas, I was providing the one thing Shandra needed more than anything else, a getaway.

Shandra probably felt as if she was stuck inside a demonic torture chamber for centuries before Jerry and I came to bail her out that day. The smell of freshly-cut skin soaked in the boiled blood of the innocent victims taken by the demon's tools disappeared as we drove away.

A secret that lies inside the experience of death, regardless if the destination is the Chamber of Elders to plan a new life, or the final extreme, is that the soul splits in two after every death. The purest of emotions take on the form of light and rejoin the main colors of the cosmos. As for the corruption, that is too heavy to carry and gets drawn into the lowest realms where they form the demons that haunted us.

Thankfully, the flesh of a demon is much like an open wound of one's worst enemy; just cover it with some salt and cover your ears while it screams. It was

one of the many secrets I learned over the course of my journey, opening windows into countless worlds. That night one of the windows peered into the world of someone I saw on a daily basis without even realizing it. It also came with the chance just to change one world forever, an idea that I had fantasized about in so many ways. Yet the methods that manifested were not ones I had imagined previously, I just figured it would be best just to adjust as time went on.

Taking the same road as I did when this mess began, I could hear Shandra breathing heavily from rotten memories. I placed my hand on her leg to let her know she was safe now. A smile on her face grew out of the gesture. I removed my hand and placed it back on the wheel so I could continue driving towards my house for the next couple minutes. The site of a foggy cemetery slowly reaching my driveway might have been uneasy for most, but for me, it was rather welcoming. The spirits I hunted were cloaked in that fog. Even a couple of my ancestors would visit whenever it appeared.

While pulling into the driveway I put my car into park. The sound of the gears shifting and the jingle of my keys from the accidental grace of my sausage fingers seemed to whisper a welcoming message.

"So this is where you live?" asked Shandra.

"Yeah, it's an alright place. You will like it here," I answered.

"I can already tell. But how is the bath?"

"Comfortable. It has been a while since I have last used it but it should be just perfect for you."

"Great, I could definitely use one."

"I could only imagine. I'll get your bag for you."

Shandra and I got out of the car to welcome ourselves into what many would probably describe as a teenager's dream house. We practically had the capability to do anything without the restrictions of parents to nag us. Being a bit of a loner I never had many people over so there were never wild parties, just brief moments of insanity emerging when I got a little too involved in certain activities. Shandra, at least from what I was able to read, was that way as well. But that was probably due to circumstances at her household.

I knew of at least two possible reactions to her sudden freedom that I could have seen manifesting. Either she would slowly adapt to the new life or she would push the adaptation too far too soon and only run into more trouble in the end. So she would not meet the same fate as many who have built a so-called "high life" around fragile monetary grounds, I needed to guide her down the path with many fruits few seek in the modern day. Call me old school, but I preferred to observe these types relationships as something cherished and divine instead something that is always around.

While stepping over to the door to the back seat I grabbed out Shandra's bag and closed up the car. Shandra had already reached the front door of my house, standing on a cement landing with three steps leading

up to it. She watched as I carried her bag with my keys in hand, shuffling through them to find the appropriate key to unlock the door. Once my feet reached the landing the key allowed itself to be seen and even slid itself into the lock. I led Shandra up the front steps and into my living room.

"It's nice," Shandra said while looking at the surroundings. As she observed the series of gaming consoles next to the television I could see a slight grin begin to bloom. She had a bit of a gamer in her.

"All of them are working if you want to hop on sometime," I told her.

She looked towards me with a loving smile. "Good. But can I ask you where the bathroom is? I really should take a bath," she responded.

"Yeah just head upstairs and go to the second door on the right. The bedroom is through the door to the left of it," I answered.

"Thank you."

Shandra took her bag and hurried up the stairs. I could hear each rushed stomp on every stair, twenty steps total. The carpet upstairs had muffled her footsteps as she entered the bathroom. I could hear her bag unzipping and set out clothes for her to change into once she was finished. The gentle breeze from clothing hitting the floor.

"I know she is beautiful, but you need to focus on the case," growled my Shadow Hunter.

"Shut the hell up," I whispered.

Regardless of what I felt, he was right. I was allowing ancient instinct to override my job. The thought of embracing Shandra as she deserved came close to poisoning the job at hand. The thrill of the day was driving a hungry beast inside me that existed long before my acquaintance with my Shadow and Light hunters. One I needed to keep under wraps, at least for a little bit.

"Aren't you needing to get your gear?" asked my Light Hunter.

"Yeah, yeah. Just help me find who was wanting to talk," I ordered.

"As you wish."

Both of my alter egos followed orders without question. They always helped when I would ask and occasionally offer up advice on how to do things better. I tried not to diffuse them from the collective, otherwise, everything else would fall apart. Honestly, they were both right. It was time I brought in my equipment. I made my keys dance in between my fingers as I walked back outside and went directly for the trunk of my car.

The gravel underneath my feet crunched under my weight. Holding the car remote next to my ear I pressed the button to unlatch the gizmos that held the trunk shut. With a loud thud, the trunk cover threw itself upward revealing the soldiers of an immobile expedition. Grabbing as many bags as I could with each trip, I set all of the bags down in the living room before the trip upstairs. After four arm lengthening trips, all of my

bags had rested themselves on the floor. Two presses of the car remote send a message of goodnight to the vehicle.

Upstairs I could hear a disturbance in a small body of water. Shandra had heard me bringing in my equipment from the car but wasn't sure of my identity. "Dakota is everything alright?" she yelled.

"Yeah. I was just bringing in a few things from the car."

"Okay."

The water in the tub began to dance welcoming Shandra's skin to what probably felt like a sense of serenity. I could hear it dancing with each movement she made as I began to bring my equipment upstairs so I could analyze everything I collected. The upstairs was slightly cramped in the hallway that grew from the stairway, with most of the floor being occupied by a couple bedrooms and bathroom. Right in front of the stairway exit was the entrance to the larger bedroom. Following about seven feet of wall bent at a ninety-degree angle was the closed door leading into the bathroom. Then following another two feet of wall another doorway was present leading into my office. Slowly moving the bags upstairs, just to avoid beating the more sensitive gear senseless, I placed everything next to the computer desk. Nearly summoning the office chair with a wave of my hand, I sat down and began unpacking everything.

The first bag I opened was a large luggage bag typically seen on hotel trips. It carried my DVR system inside. I placed the main hard drive on a shelf hanging just above the desk and used special cables to connect it to the main network, allow me to shift through its files if needed. Inside the bag also lied the four cameras that came with system. I wrapped them in the original boxes and tucked them in a small, walk-in closet. The various gadgets that were packed away in the following bags also were organized there by function. If it read the environment, it would be bundled with others like it. If it recorded video or audio, it would be set in another group. In short, one may describe the way I organized my gadgets could be compared to a three-dimensional pie chart since I even set some of it in little bowls nailed to the walls of the closet. Usually, various types of loose batteries or protection amulets of all sorts were stored in them.

Once all of the bags were emptied, and the long cords from my cameras were tightly wrapped around storage reels, I set my laptop on my desk. Next, to it I placed the memory cards from my hand held cameras and a digital voice recorder with a long patching cable attached so I could begin moving the files onto my computer. When everything had finally been set, I settled down and turned on the computer. While waiting for everything to load, I could not help but hear a cheerful hum coming from the bathtub in the next

room. It was rather relaxing, perhaps it was something from her childhood.

As my computer booted up in sync with the rest of the network I snapped one end of the patching cable into the microphone port on my computer and loaded a sound editing software. Because my recorder didn't have a way to move files onto a computer, I had to manually re-record them to the network using a free software I found online; it wasn't the best out there, it wasn't what a lot of major production studios would use. The program was something I found to save money that did the job exceptionally well. If one were to change how the software displayed the sound recording, infrasound was mapped on the screen.

Infrasound was the term used to describe sounds under the normal human range of hearing. These were the frequencies where the voices of spirits often existed. It wasn't because they existed in different dimensions, or even on an astral plane, and sound had a hard time breaking through the barriers. It was due to the fact spirits were intelligent manifestations of photon particles that formed themselves into "moldings" placed by the image of a person based on the last image they saw of themselves before they died. In short, these types of manifestations simply had a hard time making some noise.

On the computer I pressed the record button inside the software, then pressed play on the recorder, starting the process. I had changed the layout of the sound

input so it would map the individual layers of sound. I opened a nearby notepad with a pencil shoved through its metal threading to a fresh page to document all of the timestamps that infrasound existed.

As I watched the recording play out on the screen, unable to hear its contents, I could hear Shandra talking to someone in a low tone. The wall muffled the words she spoke. I focused on her voice wondering who she was talking to because I didn't remember seeing a cell phone. In fact, I didn't have a land line in there. One thought was that she also had the habit of talking to herself, but the speech was paused as if waiting for a response. After minutes had passed I finally made sense of just a few words. Even though they resembled a weak identification, but yet powerful in the same. Words that I remembered and would want to be etched into my gravestone.

"Dakota is the one," Shandra said.

I could not tell what she meant by those words. Did our time-traveling daughter, Olivia, reveal the truth she kept me away from, or if she meant a prophecy of her own. If she approached me about it, maybe I would be able to find out more. The echos of water adjusting to a moving body made me jump back into focus. Something about hearing that phrase made me worry about getting caught listening in on her while she was in the tub. I guess that I still had a bit of a shy approach to women, perhaps it was a good thing I did. Otherwise, I may have been tortured by instinctive temptations.

The drain in the tub gulped all of the dirty bath water as Shandra snapped her towel in the air. Slight steps could be heard on the bathroom floor. The breeze from long thick hair getting whipped around whistled through the cracks around the bathroom door. Something told me that the way she rushed to get out of that room was to speak with me about something. I could read her mind which was nearly cluttered with various thoughts that needed to be organized through an outlet otherwise she would have a restless night. That was alright; I am someone that practically saved her life and some people may take a discomfort to not knowing much about their hero.

As the bathroom door opened, the wood vibrated. Because the door was hollow. The only piece that held it together was the metal lock. The wrong jerk could easily rip that door apart. In a single step, Shandra leaped from the bathroom to the doorway of the office, standing in pink pajamas with tiny red hearts scattered all over them.

"Hey can we talk?" she asked.

"Of course. Please sit down," I said gesturing towards the cot just barely outside arm's length.

"You aren't too busy with... whatever you are doing?" she asked.

"No, I have at least four hours to copy over so I have plenty of time."

Shandra took my suggestion and sat on the camping bed, swaying side-to-side to make herself more com-

fortable. The shimmer of her wet black hair dancing in the setting sun held my attention to her eyes now clear of all troubles that had plagued her for many years. She let out a slight nervous sigh as she tried to organize her thoughts.

"What exactly is it that you do?" she asked.

"Well, my answer really depends on how much you understand," I answered.

"It's just that... I don't know. You are so kind, then I see you literally jump into my mind. You show me that you have your own business, then you end up helping cops in order to let me stay at your place. You have been so all over the place it is hard to keep track of everything. Like, how in the heck did you get the social worker to let me come with you?"

"I see," I giggled, "I guess it is fair I fill you in on everything."

I remembered the time set on my computer for the screen saver. So I raised my left arm and snapped my fingers in synch with the activation of the screen saver after I had been idle on my computer for a minute, as a way to joke with the idea a mystery flowed around me. The screen showed metallic letters spelling out PRF, the acronym for my team's name, rotating in front of a black background.

"I hope that you do," said Shandra glancing at the letters.

I paused to think about what story I should tell first. As I took a moment to sort through my thoughts I re-

alized it was rather odd knowing that a social worker would give up a teenage girl to a teenage boy who lived alone, even if I met special conditions. Most of the time they would be eager to ship off a poor child to the first free foster home on a state registry, even if it was decided to keep the child in the same city so they wouldn't miss school. My place wasn't on that registry, for obvious reasons. So how did Officer Jerome manage to convince the responding social worker to let Shandra stay with me? "You know, now that I think about it, I actually have no clue how it happened," I told her.

"Really? What about Officer Jerry? Wouldn't he know?" she asked.

It was hard to deliver an answer, simply because providing shelter for anyone I was trying to save was never a part of the plan. The Shadow Net that was formed between Jerry and me was designed to catch the victims that fell through legal cracks and keep them away from any sticky situation that might compromise their life. Somehow, actually having to keep someone in place was never considered, or even thought of, when the initial protocols were decided. Maybe Jerry had thought of something afterward and never told me.

"Why don't we give him a call? He still might be at your house," I said.

She nodded her head in agreement because she knew just as well that under typical conditions social workers will become damned and determined to pull kids away from "bad" parents, with the only good in-

tention to keep siblings together. So I pulled out my phone and looked for Jerry's number through my contact list. I allowed my fingers to press send and turn on the speakerphone while it rang. Three rings later, somebody finally answered.

"This is Officer 71349, Tracey Jerome," he announced.

"Jerry, it's me," I told him.

"Dakota?" he asked, "Is everything okay with Shandra?"

"Everything is fine," I answered, "I need to ask you something."

"Let me guess, you're wonderin' how I managed to convince the social worker to let you two stay together?"

"Actually, yes that is what we were wondering."

"The social worker is my sister, Elisa. She owes me a few favors so I figured I cash them in. Don't say I haven't done anything for you."

Shandra and I jumped on the news. We didn't know Jerry had a sister or even any siblings for that matter. I had been working with the guy for some time now and only knew about his wife and two kids.

"You have a sister in social services?" I asked him.

"Yep, and a twin brother who's a navy seal," he answered.

"Really? That explains a lot."

"I hope it does because I need to go. The scene is wrapping up."

"Alright, see ya."

"Oh, and by the way, my sister will come by your place tomorrow afternoon just to check in. And don't worry, the paperwork is already blacked out."

I hung up my phone and set it aside once I knew Jerry had done so. Once my phone made contact with my desk my mind quickly started to analyze the situation. Forensics must have finished up for the day. Shandra's house was going to be closed off due to the nature of what happened. Unless somebody had a badge or a forensics lanyard, nobody was going to be in or out of there for a while. Once the investigation was over, it would be likely somebody would have to go through and clean up the place before Shandra could go back home. Her case fits under very typical guidelines for domestic assault cases gone too far. But in her case, forces behind the scenes were manipulating all parties so a better future could come from it. Yet little did I know there were other forces tying together the loose ends.

Shandra was waving her hands in front of my face in order to catch my attention. "Hey Dakota, are you alright?" she asked.

"Yeah sorry. I sometimes zone out when my mind tries to read a bit more into what is happening," I answered.

"Oh, okay. I was just asking what Jerry meant by, 'the paperwork is blacked out.' Does he mean no one will know I am here?"

“Only people that would be stupid enough to only look through the paperwork would be clueless about where you are at.”

“So how does that work?”

“Before the file is even copied, parts of it are crossed out with a special black marker. In your case, only enough information will remain to hint that you were put into a safe house. Just to make it look better there will also be information about the surveillance you and I are placed under.”

“So it's kinda like in the movies? Where a secret agent of the government looks through classified files?”

“Yeah, a little bit.”

Shandra let her eyes wander to the nearby closet where I had stored my equipment from the night before. I could tell by the look on her face that a new set of questions had emerged inside her head pertaining to how I managed to get wrapped up in everything I do.

“So, if you don't mind me asking, how is it that you got involved with all of this?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, what was it that happened that lead you to start ghost investigating, or whatever it is that you do. Something like that doesn't come up out of nowhere.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean and you are right. Somebody like me, hunting ghosts and chasing bad guys at the age of fifteen is unusual.”

“So, how did it all start?”

I honestly had no clue on how to answer her question. There are three separate stories I could tell that contributed to how I became who I was, with each one coming to life at a different point in my lineage. But with some thought, I figured the best way to start was to tell the origin story I often shared in various interviews since it was the one I remembered best. It didn't necessarily cover why I chased bad guys, but it did cover my basis as to why I started ghost hunting.

Chapter 6

Field Trip Through Time

I bet many of you reading this are wondering the same thing. How does somebody become so involved in “paranormal” activities? Well to tell you the truth, everyone's answers to that question will be different but they did typically fall under three general categories. For some people, they decided to research the paranormal because of a personal experience. Others heard a story something through the grapevine about alleged ghosts haunting. Then there is the third category, consisting of individuals trying to emulate the paranormal investigation groups they happened to see on television. Personally, my story makes itself at home in all three categories. In fact, the story I am about to share was officially the first attempt my fate took in order to seal my destiny, or in many aspects, my curse.

I was nine years old when it happened. I don't exactly remember the date. All I really remember is that the morning was cold, cloudy, and dark when it all began in the small town of Murtaugh. The school I went to was very small, only one classroom per grade-level. For Idaho history, the fourth-grade class always took a field trip to the Capitol in order to learn more about how the state grew from the mouths that called the shots across the state. Because our school was so small, the third-grade class got to join the trip in order to help get the school a larger group discount, which was the class I was in at the time.

On the day of the trip, everybody that was going had to meet up in front of the high school building at six in the morning. The overall district consisted of four structures; two schools, one gym, and a football field that stood in the middle of all four. So the teachers could fit in the tours of all the buildings we would visit into normal school hours, and because the drive to the capital city of Boise took about two hours, everyone had to meet up before the crack of dawn. My mother had dropped me off with a large cooler I borrowed from my grandfather; full of chips, sodas, cream cakes and sandwiches for lunch. Once she noticed my friend Cherry had finally arrived, she left me in a crowd of tightly bundled children with small lunchboxes for their own meals. I always had the appetite of a professional football player so my mother always tried to make sure I had plenty to eat. If I couldn't finish dur-

ing the time we were supposed to use solely for lunch, I could always split some of what remained with a buddy or two. As I made my way through the crowd I noticed Cherry was nearly asleep.

"Hey Cherry," I shouted.

"Hey Dakota," she groaned.

Cherry wasn't much of a morning person, so having to get up at four in the morning was a struggle for her. At that time I had a weird habit of waking up at four and would often find myself staying awake by playing a video game until I heard the screams of my mother's alarm clock. So inevitably I became the one to make sure she made it on the buses. It was alright, Cherry was the only one I got along with in the entire school other than a couple girls that happened to be my cousins.

As we sat near wilted rose bushes to wait for the buses, a teacher came out of the high school with a frustrated look plastered onto her face. "Alright students, I have some bad news. The fluids inside the bus froze so it is going to be a little longer before we can go to the capitol," she announced just before the waves of moans and groans.

The gas lines in the school buses often froze during the winter time, often leading to school being closed for the day. In most cases, everyone would be excited for even the slightest chance of no school but many of us were looking forward to the trip.

Murtaugh, along with much of Southern Idaho, didn't possess many fun activities for its inhabitants making a trip to the capitol the only exciting event that was local. For this trip we were scheduled to visit a historical museum, then a tour of the capitol building, and after lunch, we were supposed to break off in groups and go on a scavenger hunt in the Old State Penitentiary. I personally looked forward to the prison most of all after I was told the rumors about some of the inmates still wandered their cells. But it was not to get a chance to talk to ghosts because at the time I was under the assumption such things didn't exist. My intentions were to scare a few incredibly gullible girls who stood in the crowd. I was a bit of a prankster growing up, which inevitably became my downfall.

I looked over to observe Cherry's reaction to the news, for she had not made a peep while everyone else was complaining. Her head bobbed up and down as she tried to stay awake, nearly making the loose stones from the garden fall from underneath her. "Are you alright?" I asked her.

"Yeah, just tired. When are the buses coming?" she whined.

"Mrs. Jones just came out and said the fuel lines froze so the buses are going to be late."

"Again? Don't they have special stuff they put in with it to make sure it doesn't freeze?"

"There is a good chance that froze, too."

Cherry groaned at the news because of how truthful it was. In Idaho, there are often winters so cold that anything used to counter the effects of weather would also freeze over. But the thing was, Murtaugh was close to a lake and there were no buildings large enough to block the weather, so often times one would find the wind and cold to be at least ten times as worse. To add insult to injury, many of the buildings were very old and lacked any materials to support themselves during the harsh weather. When this would happen the only lights would be from old candles and lightning strikes. This was the type of town to live if one wanted to escape the benefits of city life, but it took heavy dedication and wit to counter the many things that could happen.

Because I grew up in this area, I already knew of a few signs to watch out in order to determine the weather. First, if large quantities of seagulls stayed in areas far from a body of water, it would be safe to assume that some rain was coming. The second sign involved the nearby canyon. At all times, no matter what part of Murtaugh you were in, the canyon was always visible. If the weather was bad enough, the canyon would be harder to spot depending on the intensity. As I was talking with Cherry I remembered these two tricks and felt compelled to check for them.

"Do you want to go check the canyon really quickly?" I asked her.

"Yeah, I need to do something to stay awake," she joked.

"Then come with me! You can sleep on the bus."

"Okay."

Cherry and I sprang from our seats and began walking away from the crowd. An old dirt parking lot sat next to the school that held a perfect view of the canyon, along with the froze school buses. We had the opportunity to observe how the severity of the entire situation. Past the beige brick school and some leafless trees was a spot the high school students would commonly use to sneak away from school. There wasn't a clear view of it from the inside of the building and the teachers would never bother to check there. I never understood why it was that anyone to easily hide there, the particular area was out in the open.

As we rounded the corner, we noticed the janitor with a portable heater laying underneath the bus trying to get it working again. Another man was inside the bus resting on the driver's seat waiting for the order to fire up the engine. From the grunting and smacking against the machines, it was easy to tell they were working towards getting all of the children out of the cold weather. The school administration had a nasty habit of neglecting the safety of the children, even causing children in kindergarten to be nearly riddled with holes after being forced to stay outside during a thick hailstorm. It took several threats of lawsuits, and

even some kids threatening to hijack a bus, in order to help make sure no kids were ever left in the weather.

Behind the bus was the perfect view of an abyss. The canyon was trying to build its very own sky to shelter the fish from the cold, making it nearly impossible to see.

"Looks like the weather is pretty bad," Cherry moaned.

"Yeah, the fog is so thick a jet could get lost in it," I said.

"No kidding."

As we spoke our attention was shifted back to the bus. The two guys working on it showed signs of excitement. The janitor jumped from underneath the bus, nearly knocking himself unconscious from getting up too quickly right as the engine roared. The gas lines must have been thawed just enough to get the bus running. If any frozen fluids still remained, the passengers would have to keep their fingers crossed in hopes it wouldn't damage anything during the drive. The route to and from Boise had a single rest area we would likely stop at for bathroom breaks. The rest of the trip was just sitting on a cramped bus just hoping for the other children to be quiet long enough to catch up on sleep.

On the bus stood two rows of leather seats. The third-grade class was ordered to the back of the bus since we were only around for a discount. I didn't mind it much; I never really had many chances to take fun trips anywhere just to simply experience the world. At

the time I thought it was nothing more than a fun trip in which the school would corrupt slightly with homework. Well, at least I was with a friend through it all.

Cherry and I picked a spot towards the far back of the bus. The last seat in each row was smaller than the others, possibly to make room in front for one of the emergency exits. No one, other than the teachers, would bother us back there. Cherry had asked that I take the spot closest to the window so she could catch up on her sleep. I saw how tired she was and done as she wished, sliding the cooler onto my lap as we sat down. As soon as our bodies met the leather she started to snore while her head gently slid to my shoulder. She drooled a little bit, leaving a salty-wet stain on my jacket. Our teacher made the rounds, pointing at each head in order to take attendance. As she approached the blank look on her face etched itself into concern at the sight of Cherry on my shoulder.

"Do you want me to move her?" she asked.

"No she is fine," I answered.

"Are you sure?"

"She's fine."

"Alright, I'll be watching you two."

My teacher knew I didn't get along with many people, and because of the treatment I received, I wasn't afraid to smack around anyone that tried something. Yet for some reason, no one in that entire town could comprehend that I was nothing more than a big softy if people were kind and respectful. To be honest, at the

time I was simply glad at least one person noticed and she held on to me for the entire trip. Being that I was always taller than most people, even while I was growing up, it was nice to meet people that didn't assume I would fit the stereotypes about tall people.

After a near three-hour drive through country roads and interstates that sliced through the mountainous terrain and small cities we finally arrived at the museum. I gently shook Cherry awake so she wouldn't be left behind.

"Hey, we're here," I whispered.

Cherry jumped as if I pulled her from a dream. "Wh... what?" she moaned while slowly observing her surroundings.

"We just got to the museum."

"Oh okay. Thanks for waking me up, did I drool?"

"A little but it's fine."

"Okay," she whispered as she nodded her head.

We both rose from our seats and began moving towards the open door of the bus. I grabbed on to each seat just to pretend it somehow made the line move faster. As Cherry and I made our way onto the parking lot of the museum our teacher, Mrs. Shirley, handed us both an assignment the class was meant to complete. I skimmed through the paper and figured that we were supposed to fill in the blanks of various historical facts by finding the answers inside exhibits in the museum.

"Alright students, for this entire trip both grades will be competing to see which class can get the most

points from finding the most answers. The winning class gets a pizza party. Now please be quiet and respectful as you go through the museum," Mrs. Shirley announced.

The fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Jones, appeared as if she wanted to add something. "If you are having trouble finding something, Mrs. Shirley and I will not help you," she told the crowd. Everyone moaned once they heard their teachers wouldn't help them for the assignment. As the moans continued we were lead inside the museum. Most of the other children ignored it, but I remember noticing several eyes being drawn to the rusted statue of Sacagawea holding her child while watching at all that passed her with eyes that desired sleep, standing just outside the glass doors towards the entrance.

Within the next couple hours, we had to find everything, Cherry and I hurried through the exhibits just to finish the sheet. We swept through old photos, preserved animal hides, and some old farming tools just so we could fill out the paperwork. By the end of the two hour period, I believe we managed to find all but two answers before the teachers started making the rounds to gather everyone. A few weeks before the trip, when permission slips were handed out, Mrs. Shirley threatened to leave people behind if they didn't come around when the buses decided to pull out. Some followed the advice, without any realization the school was too small to get away with such an act.

The next stop was a tour of the capitol building. The only thought that existed in most of our minds was how much it resembled images we would see on television depicting Washington, DC. A tour guide greeted us inside the main lobby and took us through the conference rooms as the children found ways to prop themselves against the walls just to rest their throbbing legs. We didn't care much for how the state senate ran; all we wanted to do was have some lunch and rest for a bit. Thankfully, because of the absence of paperwork at this stop, our wishes came true during the bus ride to a park not too far from our final destination, the Old State Penitentiary.

Cherry and I were more excited about the tour of the Old State Penitentiary than any other aspect of the tour. Something about digging into the dark past of a place made us more at home than anything else. We shared common interests in history and science as if we both grew up with scholars for parents. But instead of the topics buried in expired textbooks, we had a personal favor towards the stuff they don't teach in school. All of the raging stars and distant world that looked like nothing more than specks of glitter in the sky, to history's crazed maniacs and the mysteries that boggle experts; the possibilities of what was out in the world were too vast for school. Textbooks only cover tiny pieces of what is out there, and reading was nothing compared to actually going out and experiencing it all. Even though I believed ghosts were nothing

more than legend, I was still interested in reading about them. The Old State Penitentiary was crawling with rumors that the old inmates still resided within the cells.

When we got back on the bus and the engine started, Mrs. Shirley finally mentioned the fact the place was supposedly haunted. Cherry noticed the look on my face after I noticed a few pairs of eyeballs trying to escape their sockets and chuckled under her breath.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

"Nothing, I just a bit of an idea," I told her.

"I know that look on your face. It's evil. I like it."

I couldn't help but laugh at what Cherry was suggesting. "Then you and I should probably stick together," I laughed.

"Haven't we already been doing that?"

The drive from the park to the prison was short; maybe two minutes at best because we had to wait in the turn lane until traffic decided to ease up just enough to let us pass. At the sight of a large, worn out building barely reserved by local agencies, I had a feeling something would happen. Something about the place felt empty and lifeless.

"Dakota, are you alright?" Cherry asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. This place just feels weird,"

"Well of course it does. All the bad people who used to be here, all of the things they did. It would make anyone feel a little freaked out."

"No, it's not that. It feels like there is nothing there, but it also feels like something is trying to get my attention."

"Really? That is weird, but maybe it's nothing."

"Yeah, maybe you are right."

"Now come on, this is the last stop."

While Cherry and I spoke the bus finally came to a stop in front of the old prison. Everyone rose from the seats, leaving behind their lunch boxes to mark their spots. My cooler was probably the safest of all of them, it stood out from the rest and because it belonged to my grandfather I would be the first person to bite into the still beating heart of whoever got stupid enough to touch it. Cherry took advantage of it to keep her bullies away so she always stuck as close to me as she could. As we got off the bus and gather in front of the main entrance, she walked closer to me than any other time during this trip. She had me convinced that she was skeptical about the claims of ghosts wandering the halls, but her actions spoke otherwise.

Mrs. Shirley and Ms. Jones guided the group to a large screening room. Most of the kids looked straight ahead, like mindless freaks, but I took the time to observe the new places I went to. The room we were in had a neutral vibe to it. Whoever was here, when the place was still operational, didn't deal with any significant event. It was almost as if everybody was nearly asleep the whole time.

Two gentlemen appeared from a nearby office came out. Based on the various similarities between the two I could tell they were brothers, possibly identical twins. They both wore nearly identical suits, had matching hairstyles and body builds. The only difference I noticed was that their height was off by a few inches. Thankfully identical twins tend to grow into natural variations as they age but sometimes they are subtle and test the mind of those around them.

The two gentlemen stood next to a small projector screen that stood on a thin stand in the middle of the room. One of them held a small gray remote that he taped against the palm of his hand as if he was impatient. Everyone seated themselves on wooden bleachers built into the walls in preparation for a short film that told the stories of some of the old inmates. The two men introduced themselves as Steve and Walter before pressing the play button on the remote to activate a hidden projector. I watched as some of the worst inmates, from insane assassins to crazed widowers, were introduced in the film. Yet for some reason, throughout the course of the film, I began to see things that weren't on the screen. The visions only appeared for brief moments but showed enough to be remembered for a lifetime. I watched as blood would drain from a random victim while the one responsible would just stand back and laugh at the work. For the length of the film, I must have zoned out while the visions mani-

fested in my mind. Cherry had her hands on my shoulder, trying to shake me back into reality.

"Dakota, are you alright?" she asked.

I honestly didn't know what I felt about the situation. I couldn't remember a time that I saw things that weren't there. So inevitably I had no clue what to say or even feel.

"Yeah, I guess I just got a little sidetracked," I answered while shaking my head back into focus.

"Are you sure? Your eyes looked pale."

"Really? Well, are they normal now?"

Cherry focused on the details of my eyes as if she was trying to help remove something from the surface of my eye. Her eyes scrunched up as if she was trying to read a message inscribed by ants within my corneas.

"They look normal, but that was weird," she said while allowing her eyes to shift into normal shape.

"Alright," I said. I wanted to say more but I noticed the class began to leave without us, teachers included. "Just stick close to me just in case it happens again and I don't notice"

"Yeah sure, but we better get going," she said while grabbing onto my hand and forcing me off of the bleachers so we would lose track of our class.

In front of the pact was one of the brothers, the other must have returned back to the office they came from. I heard from one of the guys in the fourth-grade class that is was Steve who decided to give us the tour of the place after Walter showed some interesting be-

havior after staring at me. I didn't think it was much at the time, maybe something about me reminded him of some work he forgot. I couldn't tell, I was only nine at the time. A majority of my worries involved whether or not food was going to taste good (my mother was not much of a cook). But regardless of what happened moments before, nothing could have prepared me for what happened during the tour.

The tour seemed to flash by in a matter of moments compared to how much time we actually spent there. Our little flock of children, clueless of the world's true workings, was guided through every inch of the prison; right through general population, through solitary confinement, past old moldy showers, and past old courtyards covered in flowers. As we walked along, I took every chance I could in order to frighten the rest of the class. I used to make them squeal at every gust of wind and scream and every flicker of dust. But as the tour continued, something decided I was in place for one of the most life changing moments I had ever experienced. In some sort of twisted manner, this incident almost had me executed for a crime that took place nearly fifty years before I was born.

Steve went on describing the purpose of the room as we entered death row and passed by the glass display of the gallows. His words, along with every other sound in the world started to fade away as I felt a surge of adrenaline coursing through my veins. My body felt as if it was preparing to die, but for people like me,

death takes a different toll. But I knew there was trouble once my eyes started moving by themselves as if they were flying to a new destination. I even remember seeing everything around me start to blur as if I was traveling at high speeds before stopping.

When my eyes finally settled, I looked around to see crowds of people I have never seen before staring at me with tears of hatred and sorrow. I did what I could to look at my surroundings just to understand what was happening. I was in a room surrounded by a glass display and spectators as if I was some underwater animal putting on a show. But perhaps what frightened me the most is that I saw a young boy tucked behind the crowds. He was alone, nobody bothered to acknowledge he was there or even act as if he was missing. A break in the crowd of spectators finally revealed that the boy wasn't with anyone. He wasn't even from the same time period. That boy, dressed in a t-shirt and denim jeans and with frozen eyes, was me.

I felt my mouth trying to say something to the boy, but no sound would emerge. My heart began to race as I felt the floor beneath me quickly jerk. Some women in the crowd cried much harder than they probably had before in their lifetimes. I tried one more time to scream myself from this nightmare, but it was no tormenting dream. This was all the dark reality of Idaho's past finding a way to reveal one its most historic events.

But my thoughts quickly disappeared into my bloodstream as my heart raced faster than ever before.

The floor beneath me had opened, forcing my body to dangle like a fish on a hook. But as the story goes, something went wrong with the rope. A noose is meant to quickly kill a man by snapping their neck once the floor beneath them disappeared, but the earlier shake had served as a warning for what was to come. I was simply hanging by the rope, slowly losing breath as it shrank my neck. My head was too low in order to see the much of the other me just outside the glass display but tiny glimpses of his scalp showed me I was the only one being killed.

But, just as quickly as it all started, the visions faded. I was back in the hallway, back in my own time, surrounded by the very group that chose to ignore my existence in a rather disturbing time. They all had fear in their eyes as if they knew something was happening to me, they knew I was about to die.

Cherry was perhaps the most frightened of them all.
“Dakota, what happened?” she cried.

I tried my best to catch my breath. My hands were curled as if I was trying to free myself from something. Somehow I took the place of one of the most famous executed criminals in Idaho history, I was almost choked to death in a time way before I was born. I felt everything he felt. I saw everything he saw. I was the killer. Only one idea came to my head that could explain it all, an explanation I had no clue how it became seeded into my mind.

"Somebody is in there," I shouted, "Somebody is going to get hur..."

I looked into the gallows where my eyes rested a half a century earlier. The man whose final moments I witnessed was still hanging on that rope, this time he was nothing more than a solid shadow. A shadow without a body, or maybe the shadow was the body. It has always been hard to classify the phenomena because much like the minds responsible for their creation they varied with every experience of their own. But before anyone else could see what I saw, that very shadow disappeared.

"Where Dakota?" asked Mrs. Shirley.

There wasn't anything I could say. How was I supposed to tell people that I watched a live execution from the eyes of the criminal just a few moments earlier when the criminal died back in the 1950s. Knowing the morons I was around at the moment and the treatment they would put me through if I spoke about it further, I kept my mouth shut. The tour guide leads us through a couple more rooms before the teachers decided to disband the pack in order to initiate a scavenger hunt. There weren't any more major incidents, just a few shadows that moved on their own and a few whispers too quiet to understand. After the scavenger hunt, we all went home. I tried to tell my mother about what happened, but even she didn't believe what I had to say.

They say that you have to be alone in order to witness the final breaths of Idaho's "Jack the Ripper," endlessly trying to plead for someone to end his suffering. But after what happened I wouldn't be surprised if people added a legend that told of a much higher voice being heard within the old gallows. Maybe because I chose to share this story, the killer will be able to show himself to those who decide to wander the prison. The group of children I was forced to stick with during the trip were completely oblivious to what happened to me, even Cherry showed a bit of a delay before trying to come to my rescue. Perhaps, because of it, a part of my soul will appear in the same place.

Inevitably I was forced into silence about my experiences; however, my silence didn't have to stay for too long. Two years later I was able to finally learn the identity of the killer. A ghost hunting television show went to the penitentiary to film an episode of their first season and captured an image of the very shadow I saw hanging from the gallows once it was all over. I was even able to finally learn his name.

His name was Ramon Snow. He was executed after stabbing a woman thirty times, inevitably killing her. The crowd outside the gallows were the woman's family and friends there to watch a killer take his last breaths. A moment in history that proved my sanity and yet at the same time it forever sealed my mind to walk in the shadows.

Chapter 7

Dreams of Time

"That is scary. But that doesn't explain everything else," said Shandra when I finished the story.

"I know and I apologize. I have a hard time explaining these details to people because there are about three different points that I could say were the influence behind how I got started. But they happened so long ago I barely remember them, other than the stories I have been told."

"So what does that mean? Are you some sort of angel? Demon? God? Superhero? What?"

I chuckled at Shandra ideas as to what could be used to describe myself.

"Actually the closest would be an unsung superhero of sorts, to be honest," I joked in response.

"Well tell me! You have caught my interest."

In response to Shandra's persistence I could not help but feel overwhelmed due to the fact I myself still had very little of an idea about how it all came to be.

"In short, me working with the police and you healing that fast, among many other things, are the result of a time when I was murdered at the age of four. After a family argument of sorts, I was stabbed in the back of the neck. I don't remember much of what happened up to that point or who did it. All I do remember was being granted two alter-egos that brought me back to life and would help me get out of that situation. One of which helped me heal you when we kissed. The other likes to hunt down criminals and other things masked by the night and fight them off in every way possible if needed."

"What else can you do?"

"Just about anything, really. Come here I will show you."

Shandra followed my lead to the window to the far side of the room. When opened, it showed a direct view of the fogged over and isolated graveyard just across the street. Something about the fog made the area feel like we stood on the outside of the legendary vile vortices; one of twelve locations around the planet where mysterious events often took place, perhaps the most notorious being the Bermuda Triangle.

Many claimed that many more of these zones existed but on much smaller scales and the activity was nowhere as intense, so any response was treated as nothing more than lore. Perhaps this graveyard just happened to be placed much like those since the fog seemed to only cover the graves. Even the plots that

were buried by construction crews had been covered by the mysterious fog. Regardless of the conditions, it wasn't different than any other case, since I was the only supernatural authority in this area. Well, I was at least the one that had a direct connection to the other side. Nobody went missing here, I made sure of that.

At that moment it was time to show Shandra one the tricks I learned early in my life. "Fog can be quite creepy when it settles like that, don't you agree?" I asked in reference to what I was about to do.

She had a minor freaked out look on her face, unsure of what I was about to do. Instead of a lengthy explanation, it was best for a simple demonstration. After opening the window I stuck my arm out, palm pointed towards the fog and fingers spread apart. My eyes sealed themselves shut while every thought in my mind flew away in a sudden windstorm. In a moment's notice, the Earth mimicked what I had seen in my mind. A strong wind gust came and cleared the fog surrounding the area, making it appear as the barren graveyard as people preferred. A rather boring and depressing sight for people like me, but comforting for people in a situation much like Shandra. My arm dropped to my side when I turned to face her.

"How did you do that?" she asked with eyes almost hanging from their sockets.

"The same way I can do this," I answered cupping my hands together.

In the graveyard was a series of red rose bushes meant for decoration. They were hardly ever trimmed, and various last minute guests for various gravestones would "borrow" them in an effort to cover the graves of their relatives. In truth the rose, no matter what color, was a symbol for life in itself. A singular flower was enough to send the messages between any two people, yet a bunch only multiplied its significance. For what most men would only do to avoid troubles with their lover was my common gift for the one my eyes feasted upon at the time, often tied with poetic words created just for them. At the time I felt it was best to show Shandra just this.

Using my abilities, I made a single bright red rose appear as if it bloomed right in the palms of my hands. When really I just allowed for it to fly into my hands. "I can make the most amazing things happen, in the purest of ways, with nothing more than a thought mixed with love," I explained.

"That is amazing," said Shandra.

Her smile grew ear-to-ear. Her eyes sparkled like the moonlight dancing off of the waves from a crystal-clear lake. It was obvious that she had never seen anything like it before. I presented the rose to Shandra.

"This is for you," I smiled smiling.

"But Dakota, we haven't even gone on our first date yet."

"Well, maybe when my paycheck comes in on Friday we can fix that."

Shandra took the flower by the stem with careful grace. As our fingers gently touched each other in the transition she leaped forward to give me hug. I could feel that her arms could barely reach around me, slowly squeezing me tighter in order to fix that notion.

"So what is it that you do for a living? Other than the whole paranormal thing," she asked while her cheek was pressed against my chest.

I could not help but worry if that was a sign of a possible gold digger. A fear that strangled my love life in fear of witnessing similar horrors inflicted upon my idols by jealous significant others. But in hope of it being simple curiosity, I answered in complete truth.

"I actually work three jobs. I get occasional payments from the city when I work a case. But the more solid jobs are working as a voice-over actor and as a writer," I told her.

"Really? How the heck did you get started on that living by yourself?"

"In short, I made a lot of good impressions at a young age and managed to work a few things out. I did everything I could to separate myself from my parents."

"Why though?"

The answer was too painful and too confusing for me at the time in order to explain it with spoken word. "I'll show you," I answered.

I walked back over to my computer to open an internet browser to search for a news article that explained

the surface of why I was living alone. Typing the web address for a local talk radio station, I pulled up an article titled, “Local Man arrested for Sexual Assault to a Minor.”

“I have heard about him. But what does that have to do with you?” asked Shandra.

My head fell in embarrassment of the actions I was about to recall. I tried to hide what happened out of fear of the reaction. There were several idiots in town that would torture any open soul with taunts from a story like that. But something told me I could trust Shandra. Perhaps it was the little girl that made sure we came together that day.

“That man... is my father,” I said, “And the child he hurt was my sister. The state put all of the kids he had with my stepmom into foster care.”

Shandra froze. She began to see my demons, not the ones that try to rip you apart from the outside. No, only humans and hungry animals do that to their victims. True demons rip you apart from the inside, then take over. I had supernatural assistance from the first two times I died which kept this from happening. But I shouldn't have tried to turn my struggles into a priority above helping Shandra, she was the one I needed to guide so her demons could no longer get to her.

She wrapped her arm around my shoulders to try to console me. “Did they at least let you visit the kids?” she asked.

“No, they didn't actually,” I answered.

"Why? You are their brother. You should be allowed to see them."

"I know. But the system started to treat me like I was my father so they made sure I never was seen or heard from them."

"Why? You didn't do anything, right?"

Tears had formed in my eyes once I started to deliver the news. My eyes burned from the salt in tears, turning the whites into bright red. Squeezing my eyes and frown shut I lifted my head so I could smother the emotion, just so I could speak clearly.

"In their eyes, I did something much worse," I said, "I looked them right in the eye and told them that if my father ever came near me, I would kill him."

I opened my eyes so I could see Shandra. A sensation that came over her grew so strong it nearly smacked me across the face. Something about what I said made her very afraid. In retrospect, now I see I reminded her of her father's abusive actions. I could see her entire body shaking.

"You don't mean it did you? You just said it out of anger?" she asked.

"I did mean it. I still do. Regardless of the fact that he was my father, he still hurt someone I cared about. He hurt his own daughter. No matter what happened to me, killing him seemed like the best option for everybody," I answered, "Yes I was angry. I was in a near rage that no one understood, not even people in my family. My own sister, the one who came forward about

what my father was doing, used the fact I threatened our own father to torment me. Yet no one seemed to realize my brothers and sisters being taken into foster care on Christmas Day was the part that hurt the worse. I never even had the chance to meet my youngest sister who was about six months old at the time. My mother's side started saying that I shouldn't care about it, which is why I started doing as many jobs I could get my hands on in order to move out of the house. Hell, the only reason I stayed in Idaho was so I could be near my grandfather who is battling cancer."

Shandra froze. She knew that trying to find the right wire to cut to avoid a possible explosion would be difficult if she spoke the wrong words. Her mind quickly filled with what ifs. What if I hadn't been around to find her? What would have happened if the wars in my family weren't raging on and I didn't know how to help her? What if I hadn't called in the cavalry when her own war waged to the eleventh hour? Too many ideas that nearly coated her hair like sweat from a summer day.

"But I must admit I am somewhat glad this all happened. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to help you. If my family had their way, I would not be able to come around when I did. If something were to happen to you, I just don't know," I nearly whispered.

"What would you have done? We hardly knew each other. You probably wouldn't pay much attention to it. Nobody would," she said.

Something about Shandra's belief of isolation reminded me of another girl's isolation that I tried to help. Someone I once knew, but hadn't seen for quite some time.

"That is where you are wrong," I said.

I leaped out my chair and stood in the hallway. There was a secret entrance to the attic, or better known as my ritual room. After discovering a Pagan background in my family line, I started utilizing spiritual methods from several cultures in times of desperation. The door leading to it was accidentally painted shut during renovations before I moved in, but with brute force, the entrance became a hiding spot for supernatural augmentations. Amulets, ritual materials, books, journals, even a few weapons in case of desperation. A custom altar with the storm eye logo I personally designed engraved into the wood overlooked the room by standing against the wall.

I looked for the hidden crease in the ceiling that would reveal the hatch and ladder. A rope dropped down and dangled. Grabbing onto the rope, I pulled it down to reveal an entrance into my own religious site. I turned to face Shandra simply to see if she wanted to see at least one more side of me. "Would you like to see more?" I asked.

"Sure, but what is up there?" she returned.

"I guess one could say that this is where my way of prayer becomes answered."

"What do you mean?"

“Come on, I promise not to start acting like a religious extremist. People like that irritate me.”

“Alright...”

Shandra slowly made her way up the ladder. When her head peaked through the hinges of her jaw came loose. She was impressed by how the room was arranged. Paintings of mythological creatures from different cultures, maps tracking various sightings, a small library of books on various supernatural subjects, and much more filled the room. Here is where I would often be found if I needed time alone; sometimes for meditations, others for a quiet place to think. As I crawled up the ladder once Shandra had scurried to one part of the room, I could tell something caught her eye. A painting of Norse Valkyries riding into battle stood in front of her like a monument to ancient tribes. Yet something about the look on her face didn't make sense.

Her eyes became fixated to one particular Valkyrie in the painting, out of a group of five. I believe her name was Svipul, which was an Old Norse term for change, at least according to online translators. According to several sources, Svipul was supposed to represent how quickly fate can change in the heat of battle. She held a spear pointed towards a warrior with blood dripping from a fresh cut on his neck, possibly signaling others like her that a new warrior would be welcomed to Valhalla. Somehow Shandra felt connected to the piece, almost like she lived it. Perhaps in a sense, she did, but the connection sprung much

deeper. Much deeper than I could imagine at the time, something I never could understand at the time, but after the war, anything is possible in the time beyond the point I am able to share this.

"Shandra, is everything alright?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's just... I think I recognize this painting," she answered.

"Maybe you have seen it in a magazine."

"No, it's not that. I think I am IN this painting," Shandra said while pointing towards Svipul. I stood next to her trying to see what she saw, but with very little luck.

An idea of what she meant had yet to make itself known to me. From what I could see, there was nothing in the painting that even resembled Shandra.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"That woman in the painting, the one in the far back, is me!"

I focused on the faces of the riders. Their names were Thrud, Reginleif, Kára, Hildr, and last but definitely not least Svipul. In order, the names meant strength, daughter of gods, the wild one, battle, and change.

Then as if guided by the end of the Valkyrie's weapons, I observed Svipul in a whole new light. A gorgeous red-headed warrior soaring above a battlefield while riding a golden-winged horse. What I hadn't seen until that moment is that she resembled Shandra in almost precise detail.

"That is interesting," I said with a tilted head.

"I know it sounds crazy but I swear that Valkyrie is me!" she yelled.

"Maybe. The Norse believed that our souls could be reincarnated. Maybe you are one of the incarnated versions of her soul."

"I don't know. Is there a way to check?"

I framed my chin between my right thumb and index finger as I sorted through my book collection in my mind. Several books on reincarnation sat amongst these shelves throughout the day, but only a few had methods to actually see an event from a past life experience. It can be a tricky task, especially if the soul had been filtered through the cosmic systems a few times. Newer souls have an easier time unless the life they are in was their first. But it was obvious Shandra was not one of those cases, giving what she wanted to do.

"There are a few ways that it can be done. But some are rather complex if you don't know what you are doing," I answered.

"Really? Can I try one?"

At the end of Shandra's request, a book came to mind that served the purpose she needed. "I think there might be one way, but it might not let you go that far back," I said.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

I walked over towards a few large shelves stuffed full of books on various supernatural subjects. Books on dreams, psychic visions, alien visitation in ancient

times, just about every legend had a copy of itself on these shelves.

"Astral Projection," I answered while.

"I didn't think that was real," said Shandra.

"It is very real, otherwise the military wouldn't have tried to experiment with it back in the seventies."

"Tried? Did something go wrong?"

"In their eyes, yes. The project got shut down back in 1995 because of very few results. There were successful attempts but those who managed to do it burnt out."

"What happened to them?"

"The military didn't have enough patience to allow its subjects to properly develop, so many of them simply became too exhausted. Almost like getting sore after the first day of gym."

Shandra rubbed her forearm after mentioning the pain of gym class. "If it hurts I don't think I want to do it," she joked.

"Don't worry, I won't put you through that. You might get a bit of a headache at most but it usually goes away in a couple minutes."

"Okay, I am going to trust you."

A book on astral projection experiences was peeking out as if someone wanted to make it easier to find. Grabbing onto the binding I could hear the covers sliding against each other, slowly letting loose a breath of relief. I had the books tightly packed into the shelves in order to fit them all.

Opening the book, allowing dust to dance about its business, I skimmed through looking for a refresher on how to properly adjust this session to make sure Shandra didn't witness any side effects in the process. If she wasn't careful, symptoms of complete body drainage could overwhelm her, or nearly kill her if not controlled. But if she had a strong mind than it should go without any issues.

"Here, I think I may have a way we can put you under without having any problems," I said.

"Put me under? You need drugs in order to do it?" she asked.

"No, that was where the government went wrong. The only drugs we use are what we are born with. We just need to adjust the levels to get you in the right state."

"What state?"

"The only way we can do this without it hurting you. Serenity."

Serenity was one polar extreme of human emotion that could power an astral projection to its full potential without feeling any wear and tear; the other being rage. But true power needed to be sprung from somewhere in the middle. The other two were power boosts when there was a sudden change to trigger fight-or-flight responses. I tried myself to strengthen my abilities in both of the extreme states but my quick temper often went into overdrive when it was needed. Ironically my temper was what allowed me to discover a few

tricks. If I taught Shandra through the opposite emotion that sprung my powers, maybe she would have a bit more pleasant time if any abilities emerged from her.

I could see an aura of curiosity dancing around Shandra. She wanted to know how a state of ultimate peace was possible in her time of near peril. "Do you still want to do this?" I asked her.

"I am too curious not to try," she answered.

"That is all I needed to know."

I put the book back in the slot left open. My mind was refreshed with the missing details, slowly converting them into something so easy a newborn infant could understand them. Shandra was ready.

"So what do we need to do?" she asked.

"Well, why don't you just find a place comfortable to rest downstairs. I am going to grab something that will help set you to mind at ease."

"Cool. I am getting a bit tired."

Shandra slowly made her way down the ladder. Silence followed until it was interrupted by the squeaks of spring mattress nearly shouted, making it obvious that she leaped on the king-size bed the moment it came into view. It took me a couple moments in order to realize what happened, but who could blame her?

Instead of grabbing some candles to allow for Shandra to relax, I just ignored the idea altogether and went down the ladder myself. Each step creaked as I slowly moved my feet downward, waiting for the moment that

one step finally would snap underneath my weight. With luck, my feet were greeted by the many arms of the carpet flooring. I reached under the ladder in order to condense it so I could seal away the ceiling until a new study was needed. The rope tried to slither its way just through to allow future access to become much easier.

Once the doorway became cloaked and tucked away in the rest of the ceiling, I thought it was safe to check on Shandra before I moved onto my other task. I slowly walked towards the bedroom, with each step muffled by the carpet no sound could be heard from inside the home. The delicate chirps of birds standing just outside the windows overlooking the backyard were all that could be heard. I stopped at the wide open door that closed away my room and peered inside. Shandra was curled underneath at least five layers of blankets, making her look like a small child who slept with their parents after a horrible nightmare. At most, she stood a couple inches above the five-foot mark on a tape measure and maybe weighed about eighty pounds at most. She was not that big of a girl at the start but lying underneath a blue and white blanket with a picture of a grizzly bear posing on a mountainside, made her look even smaller.

My stature was comparable to of a small adult black bear at the time, giving a rather interesting image of how Shandra and I would look standing together. But to be honest, as most of my relationships have shown,

people always left us alone because of our size difference. I never understood why that happened, but somehow it managed to hold back the mountains of crap people tried to cover us with. Not a pleasant sight, but one that quickly faded as the small hill on the bed slowly grew and shrank with every breath she took.

Laying on her right side with each breath she took a slight whistle almost wrote its own tune. Perhaps she had already entered a dream and her speech was trying to reach out from the world inside her head. Dreams can be quite mysterious portals to other times and places just to keep our mind busy as we rested through the night. I was about to put Shandra under a trance that would take her to the last significant moment of her previous incarnations on this Earth. Maybe her dream would do all the work. I didn't have all of my chips placed on that bet though because of what I knew about the phenomena we were trying to study.

Reincarnation is a cosmic recycling system, constantly filtering souls and distributing them all throughout existence. It served as a third option for those who were not yet ready for Heaven and Hell. My theory: the process of the life of the soul begins with the death of a star. Photons traveling all across the cosmos submerge themselves into pools of genetic material slightly altering whatever was present. As the genetic material becomes a living being, the experiences it endures make slight alterations to certain markers in reproductive materials allowing for talents

and even altered personalities to pass onto future generations. Those changes are also cataloged inside the human mind. When we pass on our soul restarts the process by altering the genetic material of another living creature by inserting talents, personality, memories, and maybe a few physical attributes. This endlessly repeats itself by the choice of the individual soul. There wasn't any way to further prove my theory, and to be honest much more would need to be done in order to come to a full understanding of what would truly happen.

In truth, I hoped that if Shandra was truly one of the Valkyrie from Norse mythology, she was disconnected from it. Not because I wanted her to be weak. If anyone fell in love with a Valkyrie, they would be slain in the name of Odin. If Shandra was to ride into battle I would prefer to be her ally, not her target.

Leaning on the door hanging against the wall of the bedroom is where I stood to watch as Shandra slept. Her mind gently drifting into dream, being held back by the lights of the outside world peering into whisper in her ears pulling her away from a long fruitful rest. I carefully walked around the room stopping at both windows to close the curtains. The taps of sliding plastic rings sliding against a gold rail on the second window put out just enough noise to wake up Shandra.

"What is going on?" she moaned.

I crouched next to the bedside with a slight smile to comfort the tired soul. "It's alright. I am just getting it dark for you," I answered.

"Oh thank you. Sorry about falling asleep."

"Don't be. Dreams can sometimes help look into the past. Maybe with the thought of looking into your past life, your dreams will do all of the work for us."

"Kinda like how sometimes dreams show the future?"

"In a way, yes. It takes much more in order to go back in time, but considering what you have been through you will be able to pull it off."

Silence. Shandra's mind was adjusting back into a slumber so deep it could only be described as something near death. I knew that she was not going to be able to respond to much. Reaching for the nearest hand, I held it in my own and gave a gentle kiss just above the knuckles. As I placed her arm near her chest, Shandra adjusted herself so mark of a kiss lined up just underneath her lips. Before I left the room, I noticed something in her hair reflecting the tiny beam of sunlight that escaped the curtains. I stood to look closer, only to find a tiny spot of red hair untouched by black hair dye. Which could explain why I felt attracted to her since I always had a thing for redheads. Even when I was growing up a pretty redhead always drew my attention.

Cherry was a redhead as well. In retrospect, I could see that a majority of the girls I would ask out, or at

least try to ask out, somehow reminded me of Cherry. Yet the raw passion often blurred my vision to many other aspects of the world, for instance, I had forgotten about a special request in order to help a very dear friend. Helping out a potential new lover left me untied to any obligations for healing prayers to give an old friend at least a few more years of life, left my mind at a clear state as I left the bedroom and secluded myself in my office. But not before I whispered, "Goodnight," to a resting soul.

I didn't worry about what could have happened to Shandra if she was successful in moving her soul into an old vessel, or the body that held her soul before it was filtered into a new one. If her past self-met a violent demise she would return just in time to avoid seeing the damage, like someone blacking out before an impact of a car crash. Biased and different views of the world ignited some of the most widespread genocides in the last five-hundred years, there was a good chance she may have defaulted to reincarnation because of a life cut too short. That kind of default was a typical choice for anyone who died within the first thirty years of their life. By the following morning, I would have a good idea of where to look simply based off of what she remembered from her dream. But I could not just simply wait for her to wake up and tell if our effort was successful. I tried to be patient but during that long of wait, I needed to do something in order to pass the time. Evidence review usually takes up a couple days,

so went back to my office to work on that while waiting for my own eyes to bar themselves shut.

My computer had fallen asleep in my absence. I guess it grew bored of waiting. Other than plugging in a digital recorder nothing else was done on this device. I looked on the digital display of the recorder to check progress. Only two of the five recording sessions had copied themselves over the audio software, I had at least two hours left. For the time being, I needed to wait for the process to be completed before looking into any other material. Having multiple software open that was not meant to work together often crashed computers, no matter how powerful the systems. At the time I depended on free software that either came with the devices I used or a few items I found online. My computers often became tangled in its own invisible wires when I attempted to use too much software at the same time, so my options became limited.

I sat down and watched the audio map itself out in front of my eyes. The shades of blue and red which indicated levels of sound burned their image into the software. The blues mapped the tones of silence and the reds showed the intensity of noise. In moments of silence, situations like a ghost hunt were mapped in shades of pink for the low levels of sound that often drove many crazy. Anything too loud would draw itself as pure white.

To pass the time left on the audio recordings I reached for a journal. I didn't log daily events as most

people probably do, but when something very important to me happened I tried to write it down in case there came a time where it was needed to bring me back from some sort of condition that erased my mind. Several illnesses ran through both sides of my family, putting myself at a higher risk for just about anything. A few included ailments of the mind that could erase all sense of memory and overall identity. I sometimes worried that something like that would happen to me so I followed up with some suggestions from a few professors on the subject. One was to document the memories most important. The other involved simply listening to music. Both instances allowed the mind to make more copies of memories and distribute them to areas that go unaffected when ailments such as dementia and Alzheimer's became an issue.

The journal I used was an old marble composition book from my eighth-grade science class. Hardly any of the pages were used for notes, most of the information I could retain. I have always been heavily interested in science, astronomy was my personal preference of study. But most scientific concepts I understood very well because I was the type of kid that would go home and research anything that caught my interest. Schools have tried for several years to get me to read fiction, but their efforts were pointless. I did not want to read anything unless it either had a real mystery or held some sort of truth behind the subject.

For the journal entry, I reached for a pen and began writing.

"April 24, 2011

"Last night I embarked on my first paranormal investigation over at grandpa's shop. Everything went well and the spirits were very active. But a couple incidents that happened almost want to make me want to keep some information from the client. I know it is not a smart move but hearing about a little boy running around with a chainsaw near your place of business is unsettling for everyone. What lead to the discovery of a chainsaw-wielding toddler seemed like something out of a horror movie. About three hours into the investigation I was conducting an EVP session in the upstairs area the spirits started to spin around me. They acted as if something had frightened them, using an old street sign as an alarm. I don't know what their issue was, but the matter will be kept on the backburner for now while I wait for new evidence. Right now I am sorting through what my equipment caught to see if anything was caught.

"I tried getting started on looking through the evidence this morning but due to yet another spontaneous babysitting job from my aunt, my effort was rendered pointless. I simply do not get why she is so stubborn and willingly dumps her own children off for free babysitting. I would have bailed but my grandfather was around, and his condition makes my aunt's actions simply pathetic. They may be simply visiting

grandparents but randomly dropping them off on a cancer patient is not something that is needed. So when she finally returned I immediately left.

"No matter, I have much more important matters to attend to than the actions of my family guided by ill choices. There is someone here who needs me. The girl from school, Shandra, ran into some family troubles of her own. I happened to run into her while at store earlier, but our casual meeting did not stop at a pleasant greet and go. Disguised in her voice a tone of suffering cried out. I knew she was in darkness. But after I saw the burns around her neck it was obvious it was about to consume her.

"I did everything I could in order to help her and thanks to me she is lying in my bed. For the eyes that peer into this, no I do not plan in romancing her other than an occasional kiss, at least for now. If something happens to change it, then I won't reject it. She is a beautiful girl, with a very beautiful soul that will start to emerge now that she is free.

"Speaking of souls, in the time she took shelter here she is now part of one of my many experiments. She believes that she is one of the Valkyries from the painting in my attic, so I put the idea of jumping through time into her head so she could see for herself. I tried to get her to do it through meditation. But before I could, she had already curled herself under the sheets. It is fine because sleep can trigger what was needed in order to accomplish the trick much quicker. I cannot guaran-

tee success but a woman's mind is much more powerful than a man's, especially if there are stimuli pushing her emotions to the limits. A woman can also be capable of developing telekinetic abilities if pushed far enough. I have always wanted to try to document that type of surge in power, but rather not have myself as a target. I did my best to keep my cool when I would put paranormal abilities to the test in other people, but sometimes the tests required a little scare to jump start what I want to see in action.

"I guess it will be best to wait until the morning.
"Dakota."

By hand my writing could take hours; by keys of the computer, it only took one. However given the tricky nature of computers and those who make them trickier it was best to have a copy of the important stuffed away in our own world. One can never really tell whether or not if their own words would become the only trace of the culture they lived and breathed. Perhaps that was how the ancient world would have felt if it peoples from those ages somehow came back and saw every bit of information our society has gathered on it.

As I thought it would, the recording had a few moments left before it was completely transferred over to my computer. The moments passed and the display on the recorder blinked as a way to let me know it was finished. I took out the patching cable from the ports on the computer and recorder and started to wrap it

around four fingers on my hand. Once wrapped I tied it with the remainder and tucked it away in the small cable box near my feet.

A pair of old radio headphones sat just behind the monitor. These cancel out white noise and put emphasis on voices. Padding around ears helped keep outside influences from disturbing any findings. I put on the headphones, isolating my ears into my own virtual world built from my many projects. New residents soon came along to set up shop. Sounds mapped across the monitor screen readied themselves for the discoveries hidden in a place known to me since childhood.

Heavy breathing shreds its way in the beginning. I almost could not help but almost feel humiliated knowing that it was my breathing that took over the recording for the first bit. Moving through the segments filled with self-briefings, I stopped just moments before the old woman screamed at me. The device wasn't recording, so the scream wasn't caught. I could hear the sound of a slight static interference that could come from the camera I had recording at the time.

"Who is out there?" asked my voice.

Something could be heard in the recording. A faint whisper was in the distant background that was impossible to understand. I used my mouse to select the area I heard the noise and activated a filter to amplify it. But disappointment sets in as it was nothing more than the sound of a mouse playing on the gravel floor came

through. A reason for many to be careful if embarking on these journeys was natural forces may interrupt any conversations. Another reason is the strain of sitting long hours behind a computer just to listen to the dead. Somehow the mind tries to keep itself busy, often inducing hallucinations in the process.

My own mind tried doing so throughout an hour of silent recordings. The only voice I could hear was my own as I walked throughout the building the entire investigation. But about two hours through the recordings somebody began to speak just as I settled myself upstairs. From what I could tell at the time was that it sounded a lot like my grandfather's old boss freaking out about something. Stopping the recording I isolated where the software mapped the voice and replayed it. Hector's voice was muffled during the times I replayed that section over and over again in order to make out what he was saying. I was only able to make out the word, "camera."

Adjusting the options on a filter, I managed to amplify the voice. Hector Johnson, my grandfather's old boss, was now confirmed to still walked around his old home. His voice sounded nearly out of breath; he may have been a smoker but this had a ton of panic. Something was scaring him.

"Dakota, check your camera. Someone is outside," said Hector.

Moments later another male voice chimed in, "He can't hear us. The others are restless. Your wife is too close to him."

Tonya Johnson could be heard a bit clearer than the other two voices. "I wasn't sure if we could trust him," she said.

My recorded voice jumped into the conversation, unaware of what had been spoken. "You know what? How about we play a game?" I asked. A few moments of silence passed as I waited for a response. Nothing.

"Here is what I am going to do, I will ask a question and you will simply respond with a yes or a no. But instead of saying it, I want you to knock. One knock for yes, two for no. If you are wondering why I am asking you to do this, the answer is simple. If you knock, I will have a better chance of actually hearing you. If you find some loose metal nearby to respond with, that would be even better. So, if you're up for it please let me know," I added.

I went silent again on the recording in order to wait for a response.

"That might help," said the male voice. A large metallic bang screamed into the night. My clothes adjusted to my body peering into the eyes of the noise. "Now we have your attention," said the voice.

"So you're alright with it?" I asked, still believing it was a woman I was speaking to on the recording. Another loud bang from the sign blankets the sounds on the software display. The loose metal can be heard vi-

brating in the background slowly orchestrating gentle swirling winds that panicked at something I couldn't see. Thinking it was a sign of understanding, I said, "Good."

Countless voices murmured in the shadows, almost impossible to understand. Something about the motion of the spirits caused interference, canceling out all other noise for the rest of the recording. I skimmed through the audio session in order to find where the interference ended. Exactly forty minutes of pure interference tampered with evidence. There was no chase, no chainsaw-wielding child, no hints to the future, nothing on the interesting events that took place that night. My grandfather would have wanted to see what was caught. But much more was needed to be analyzed.

But Hector's warning could not escape me. He wanted me to see something that was in the view of my camera. Which one I couldn't tell. My first thought was that it could be something on the outside disturbing the spirits, but my cameras didn't have a clear shot. The bottoms of the windows were about twelve feet off the ground. It was hard enough trying to keep whatever could shine through them from interrupting the case.

After checking the rest of the audio recording, nothing else came up. Since photos and now audio was cleared it was time I got down to video. I found the note on my laptop with the timestamp from watching the videos back at my grandparent's house. The video soft-

ware displaying images right after the white head appeared in frame.

Hours passed as I sat there watching the shaky camera footage. Hours of pausing at every little flicker that seemed out of place. I tried to find more anomalies but most of what I saw on that video could easily be discredited from a paranormal status. Regardless of the many videos posted online, the supernatural activity from horror flicks is not easy to catch. It may be a bit of fantasy for people like me, but it is a simple fact. Spirits have a hard time maintaining a physical state. They are fueled by several environmental factors. Too severe of the activity actually shouldn't have happened at the intensity it happened. Some of the activity may have been fueled by my nerves, but nerves were not enough to fuel the night as I became accustomed to the night.

But then in a shot peering down from the upstairs I noticed something. Something appeared just outside the window for a few frames then disappeared. I clicked just a few moments ahead of the time slot and clicked on a button that showed a rectangle and arrow pointing to the right. This was how to play footage frame by frame if we caught something that simply moved too fast. Click. Click. Click. The view was finally clear enough to see. I magnified the footage to get a closer look at what could have been spooking the "spooks," so to speak. It was one of the Suits that tried to kill me!

Every question I could think of came rushing through my mind. Why did they stalk my case? What

did they want? Why were they stalking me? Just about any thought that burned the minds of hunted innocents being chased by some sociopath flooded my own mind. Then something came to mind that eased fear into rage. Some eyewitnesses claim they had been researching the Suits only to be visited by the very entities moments later. I slowly rolled over to the window and stood from my chair. As the view to the outside world slowly grew I scanned the area to find anything unusual.

Surprise. Surprise. The black SUV from the day before was parked in the driveway in the graveyard. The clicks of the locks whispered in the distance as one of the Suits stepped out. A couple folders, stacked full of paperwork, sat on the middle console in the vehicle waved as the suit no longer blocked the view until he closed the door. He appeared that he was wanting to say something, yet it was hard to notice any movement on his face.

“Hello, Mr. Frandsen,” said a voice in my head.

“Who the hell are you?” I asked with a growl.

“One of many who is interested in what you do.”

“What do you want from me?”

“Mr. Frandsen, we want you on our side when the time comes.”

“What do you mean?”

“A war is coming. All that hope to survive need to pick a side.”

“Who is fighting?

“Everyone and no one.”

A black fog grew from the SUV and engulfed it. Moments later the fog had dissipated with the SUV. Disappearing before my eyes, the suits appeared as if they never were there at all. No trace of their presence could be seen. Were the suits phantom killers or guardians cloaked as demons? I couldn't tell at the time, yet my options for finding out had not fully existed. Nobody knew exactly who they were or where they came from. As I noticed from my first encounter, details hinted at an extraterrestrial origin but I had very little evidence to go on in order to make any conclusions.

Another thing that didn't add up was why the Suits intervened on a ghost hunt. Except for the final moments of my encounter with the small boy that crossed over, there was no indication of UFO phenomena. Sometimes the Suits would appear after someone would report creatures similar in nature to the infamous Loch Ness Monster, but never ghosts. I tried to piece together what it was that they were after, with the only major clue came from something that technically didn't exist.

“A war is coming. All that hope to survive need to pick a side.”

Those words rang through my mind on a loop. Every possible interpretation of the phrase rang through my mind in an attempt to foresee the possible future. But something had blocked me, something that came from

inside of me. The voice of the older woman who served as a spirit guide emerged to clear it up.

"They want you to fight for them," she whispered before fading away.

It was surprisingly obvious. The Suits, or at least whoever they work for, wanted me to fight with them. Probably to find a way to extract my DNA as a way to experiment on how to transfer my abilities to the modern soldier. Just about any major government facility in any country would try to do the same. I honestly didn't blame them for researching this phenomenon. The things that could be done were pretty cool and thought to provoke for those who bothered with the concepts.

But the problem was the overuse of military applications. Higher-ups in military and overall government in the United States have a nasty reputation of treating their subjects like machines. They believed that it was easy to rebuild or simply replace people. They foolishly accepted supernatural abilities as machines which would often lead to great amounts of damage to the subjects. It was likely that I was being turned into the focus of further studies but somehow fit in a category of people that could take whatever they could fire at us. Otherwise, the Suits wouldn't be studying me like a scientist would study a new species in its natural habitat before putting it in a cage. At the moment it was best that I simply kept my eyes open for more sightings of these entities. If they wanted me to join

them there was a possibility that I could find evidence of what was coming. Perhaps even speaking with a few of my more gifted psychic colleagues for their insight.

I sat back in my chair and rolled back towards the computer. The time on the display towards the bottom right side of the screen read, "8:21 p.m." Time seemed to rush itself that night. By many methods this always time's way of warning me something was coming and soon. It was truly scary when this happened, but I was quick to deduce where the conflict was to originate. The existence of variables involving supernatural elements made it hard to tell what trouble was coming. In memory of the new risks, I could not help but glance towards my bedroom door. Shandra was a welcomed risk. It would be easy for her to get caught in the cross-fire by staying but this was obviously where she needed to be. Only time would be able to tell what she was needed for.

I could have wasted my time trying to figure it out, but the mere thought of what could happen would cloud any resources I could use to find the answer. Keeping my attention on other ventures was probably for the best until more answers revealed themselves. So after three hours of more evidence review, I shut down my computers and laid down on the cot. Slowly my eyes shut allowing my mind to enter into dream.

Every detail of the dream from that night was easy. The dream this time dropped me out in the desert. Small hints of sage brush and cacti were randomly dis-

tributed in the yellow sands. A small breeze allowed the sand to run and play like small children. A small group of lizards and snakes scurried around my feet as if they welcomed me into their home. In a sudden second, they stopped moving as if frozen by something. A trumpet sound rang through the sky, frightening the animals. Tiny holes grew in the ground from where the reptiles burrowed. As the trumpet blew a large hallway rose from the ground and closed me inside. Eroded bricks lined the hallway that seemed to reach past the horizon. With no other options to move, I walked down the path. Familiar shapes begin to draw themselves into the ancient bricks with each step I took.

As I journeyed farther and farther, the screams of a woman in fear filled the hallway. My blood grows fur and claws in response to someone in need. I always believed in four tools to combat danger; serene, rage, humane, and feral. Anyone could pick two in order to fight off a new struggle. My favorite choices were the humane feral. A way to channel animal strength, but still be able to help the attacked. Those choices often reflected on my dreams and this was no different.

When the screams grew louder my footwork grew in speed. The only thing I knew was the simple fact I was getting closer. The rush of a mad wind blew past my ears, slowly destroying the ancient hallways and the rest of the desert as I moved forward. My feet shook the ground creating an earthquake that added to the

destruction. The hallway crumbled behind me as I continued forward.

As I reached the end I notice the outline of a small woman lying in a large bed through dancing shadows that spun around her. The rattles of chains violently shook and smacked against the bed as the woman tried to fend off her attackers.

A youthful voice rang in my ears screaming, "Daddy help Mommy!"

In the final moments, I let out a Viking war cry to ready the attackers for an imminent death. But to only be stunned by the shadows disappearing with no notice.

The cries of the woman continued as if she was still being harmed by unseen forces. As I stared, watching her body shake violently without any idea of how to help, my rage begins to set. I begin to notice more details, such as the woman bound by chains was no random face. It was Shandra, wrapped in a peasant's tunic from ancient Egypt. Her violent shakes loosened the clothing, revealing much more to her than I had hoped. Her head jerked side-to-side almost controlling the night scene. Each time her head threw itself into the bed, the scene around us shifted into a new form. We no longer were stuck in the ancient structure. We were now safe in my bedroom.

I could not tell if the dream was still happening. Even though the attackers and chains were gone, Shandra continued to shake in a frightened manner.

"Shandra," I shouted rushing to her side, "Shandra wake up!" She jerked herself upward at the sound of my voice.

"Oh my god, Dakota!" she shrieked. Before I knew it Shandra wrapped her arms around me. A cold winter's shiver took over her body.

"It's okay. It was nothing more than a dream."

"No, it wasn't. It was real. It was too real. Please don't go."

She slowly tightened her arms to hold me close to her. I could feel the blood in her veins nearly coming to a stop as I wrapped my arms around her. We slowly lied back on the bed. Shandra's head slowly fell against my chest as her hair covered my shoulder.

"I won't ever go; I will always be around when you need me," I whispered.

"What if something happens to you?"

"Shandra, if you ever need me and I am not there, look to the stars. My mind has always been there, so it is only a matter of time before my body decides to join."

I noticed a slight smile in the darkness grow on her face as she drifted to sleep once again. I didn't want to disturb her, so I allowed myself to fall asleep right next to her as I gently stroked her hair. As my eyes closed I could see the image of our little girl crawling on the bed to join us.

"Goodnight," Olivia whispered.

"Goodnight," Shandra and I responded as if in tune.

It must have been close to midnight when the dreams began to merge with reality that night. For me, it was a common occurrence for my dreams to leak into the physical world, but I never could find out why. I could never find out why my own mind often broke boundaries set by mainstream understandings. What happened that night was probably one of my worst episodes now that I think about it. The details engraved into the walls of the ancient-looking structure from my dream nearly replicated the upstairs hallway of my home but stretched out. Any decorations in that particular part of my home would be separated by what seemed to be several miles. To fill the empty gaps, images from events I didn't recognize would draw themselves in the sands. These images almost could almost write an endless series of books to dictate the progress of time.

As for Shandra and I, we enjoyed the moments of starlight that flickered in the sky just barely illuminating the Earth while the moon was absent. At times I would awake for just a moment to check if the dreams would continue on, but meeting the same conclusion each time. What was happening, what has happened, was in fact reality. A blissful thought for someone like me, who had always been stuck with the label of "just friends" by several of the women I tried to meet.

But none of it mattered. Being in a relationship didn't affect me much growing up, probably because I was raised to know the difference between lust and

love. There are few that earned my hands as well as my heart. They were the ones that were genuine. Ones who realized that sex would only complicate life in itself if not honored by a sacred bond. People who owned this reality would blindly blame the other gender for the faults of corrupt lovers. But in truth people of all genders had a factor in making the ideals of love to become a lost art, even forcing Cupid himself to retire. My struggle has been to prove that I was not like the foolish, yet my satisfaction came when I knew at least one person saw that in me. During my earlier years as a paranormal investigator I had one person who saw it that way, and in that moment her head laid on my chest. Based on simply how comfortable she looked, I must have felt like a giant teddy bear to her.

Morning broke free. The inconvenient greeting of sunlight personally yanking the covers from the countless bodies thus carrying them away from a wonderful night. Beams of light took their time to scan the bodies that laid in my bed that morning. As they inched up the sheets, my eyes began to open themselves to meet the day. I was disoriented as my mind painfully woke itself to meet the demands of everything outside of my body. I leaned my head forward just enough to get a look around. My memory of what happened over the course of the night was vague. Clues such as a dent in the wall just behind door and the signs of forced entry around the hinges put the proper images in my mind. The dream played itself over again in my mind.

The ancient hall crumbling with each step I took. The shadows taunting a bound woman. My daughter crying out for her father to rescue her mother. Every detail returned to form an even better image than it was created.

My thoughts were interrupted by dark, dancing hair that spread across my chest. Shandra was waking up from her slumber. Gentle moans playfully singing to welcome herself to the morning ways.

“Morning, Dakota,” she moaned.

“Morning. How did you sleep?” I asked her.

“Better after you came in.”

“Good. I am glad I could help.”

Shandra opened up her eyes to stare into mine. “So what happened last night?” she wondered.

“What do you remember?”

“Not much. I remember getting trapped by these weird shadows. Then after a little girl cried out, you came in and the shadows disappeared.”

“That's weird. I remember seeing all of that.”

“Weird for you? That is a little ironic coming from someone like you.”

“Yeah. But things have been changing lately so anything is possible.”

“So what does it mean?”

“Usually means that something important is coming.”

“Like our daughter?”

I couldn't believe it. Shandra had confirmed it all on her own accord. Until that very moment, Olivia had tried to hide it from the both of us while secretly uniting our paths. Even though the day my world collided with Shandra's technically revealed everything. My head became filled with questions and theories on why it all was happening, making my voice freeze itself in place.

"Do you think she had anything to do with it?" asked Shandra.

"For the dream? No, but I do think she is a big part of it."

"This is all too confusing. First, she saves my life, but she never tells me why she did it."

"Really? Is that how you met her?"

"I don't really want to talk about it right now."

"I get it. But, if it does make things easier, she did save me as well..."

Before I could finish, the roar of an empty stomach startled both of us. We both squeezed our eyes shut and laughed at the intrusion. Shandra's laugh was nearly as contagious as the laughter of a baby. Each peak of her voice massaged my heart to ease.

"I am so sorry," Shandra blushed.

"Don't be. How about I go make us some breakfast and then we will talk about it?"

"Yeah, I would like that. What is on the menu?"

"How about some pancakes?"

"I'd love some."

“Cool. Then how about I bring it back up so you and I can have breakfast in bed?”

“I’d like that.”

I leaned forward to give Shandra a kiss. The sweet taste of an angel's breath awoke my body for the morning duties when all it wanted to do was simply lay in that bed. Moments passed before our lips decided it was enough, gently pulling us apart. Before I could leave, Shandra sneaked one last peck to my lips as a sign of gratitude towards my care for her. I have always wondered if she was simply thanking me, or if she felt that I was only doing this because I felt sympathetic of her misfortune. In truth, I guess I did feel bad for her, but as long as she was still the kind soul she was when we met, it would all be the same.

But the growing histories between us signaled that no matter what we decided to do, something was coming for us. It was obvious that the times before Shandra and I crossed paths might have held clues. Clues that could unveil the mysterious origins of our baby girl. But the information was clouded around dark memories that are hard for most people to recite for the less educated. Thankfully some delicious comfort food is enough to distract them from what is holding them back.

As I got up from the mattress, a small wave rippled through the bedspreads nearly launching Shandra. Two slight giggles filled the room. One came from Shandra and the other from an invisible source. It wasn't from

Olivia, the tone was deeper than a small child. Perhaps it was just another spirit visiting from the nearby graveyard.

I exited the bedroom and walked down the stairs. With each step I took, I went closer to the main room, which was divided into three by the changes in the flooring. The living room had soft, gray carpet. The dining room and kitchen had hardwood tiles to make things easier to clean in the event of a spill. Each step I took echoed as if the house was much larger in size but empty.

I quickly walked into the kitchen and sorted through the pots and pans, tucked away in the bottom cupboards, to find what I needed. The handle of a large black skillet almost fell into my hand. I pulled it out from the cupboard. At the sight of a departing friend, the other pans tried to fall out in unison. I quickly shut the cupboard door to evade a noisy mess.

"You know, this is how I always thought our life would be like if we had the chance," whispered a female voice from behind me.

Something about this voice brought an all too familiar sense. It was as if something I forgot was now staring me in the face with angry eyes.

"What? You don't remember me?" the voice asked, "I guess a few things have changed since the last time we saw each other."

As the voice continued to speak my mind came closer to identifying the source. Whoever was speaking

had obviously known me from somewhere. I needed to find out where though.

"Who's there?" I asked.

"Gimme a second, Koda," she replied.

As I turned to face the voice, I noticed a blurry image began to manifest right in front of me. When the image became clear it became obvious that the identity of the woman trying to talk to me was, in fact, someone I nearly was forgotten. It was my dear friend Cherry.

"Cherry. It is good to see you," I said.

"It is good to see you too. Even though I was hoping for more a favorable reunion," she joked.

"You and me both. So how are you feeling?"

"Better now. The light wouldn't come 'til I got a chance to see you."

"Why?"

"So I could let you know that I was gone."

"Are you going to be okay?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine. But I won't be gone for long. We were born from the same star. Even Shandra was there when we arrived on this world."

A bright, white light grew from out of the window that readied itself to carry away Cherry's soul. We both knew time was limited. "Well I hope that you find peace in whatever lies ahead for you," I said.

"Thank you," she responded.

As she walked over to the light. She paused for just a brief moment to say, "You know, I have always liked the name Olivia," before disappearing. At the time I didn't

think much of it, but I realized exactly what she met after I gave some thought. She was to be incarnated into my own daughter.

Reincarnation was a mysterious force. It was hard to tell where souls would go, but the only thing that was certain was that souls came from solar flares and lightning. Many can tell if they had more than a few runs on a world based on how much they understood. But until there was a way to track the soul, it was nearly impossible to understand the entire process. The way people even came close to understanding the supernatural world, in general, was the modern equivalent of how ancient philosophers came to their conclusions, through thought and reasoning. It never did get the whole picture, but one has to admit that it gets pretty dang close if done right.

But if I stood there just thinking about what happened, I would never fulfill my proposal of breakfast in bed. Olivia/Cherry could wait until the day I got to hold her in my arms. But Shandra needed me now. So snapping back into focus I hurried and grabbed some pancake mix out of the freezer and started cooking. About ten minutes later, I finished cooking a stack of six pancakes for Shandra and me to split. I dug out some plates, glasses, and utensils from the top cupboards and arranged them in the appropriate order. For the final touch, I filled the glasses with some orange juice to help us wake up for the morning.

Once the meal was prepared I grabbed the edges of the tray and made my way up the stairs. The meal tried to sway side-to-side as I tried to maneuver the tight stairway. But the determination of my cause helped still my hands as I walked back into my bedroom.

"Pancakes and some orange juice, my lady," I announced in a butler impression. Shandra who had been lying in wait sat up with an amused look on her face.

"Oh, why thank you my dear!" she squeaked in a phony English accent.

I couldn't help but smile at the gesture. A woman that had a sense of humor automatically became several times more attractive. I couldn't help but giggle as I set the tray right in front of her. She immediately dug into the food, before I managed to sit, as if she had been starved for days.

"Looks like you have quite an appetite," I joked, "Are they good at least?"

"Yes, these are delicious," she said after swallowing a bite a bit too large for her to handle.

"Good."

"So are you ready to talk about how you met Olivia?"

"Yeah, just give me a sec."

Shandra held up her index finger to signal a pause in her thinking. With each movement of her lower jaw, the gears in her mind clinked against each other in an effort to produce a way to word her experience. When she swallowed, her hand dropped and smacked the bed as the story tried to sprout from her lips.

"Well it started when my mom met my dad after he got back from the war just after I turned thirteen," she sighed, "He got really violent with me and my mom. I started blaming myself for everything that would happen and I just had enough."

Something told me Shandra did not want to continue. That same something also told me the rest of the story.

"Let me guess, you tried to hang yourself but something made you stop before you'd do it," I said.

"Yeah! Then this bright blue light surrounded me. That was when I saw Olivia for the first time. Ever since then I see her at the most random times, but lately, I have been seeing her around you."

"That pretty much describes how I met her."

"Yeah well until recently she has been freaking me out! Every time I tried asking her about where she is from her either giggles or disappears."

A playful, childish giggle surrounded the room. "See what I mean?" Shandra asked.

"Yeah I see," I answered, "Good to know now that our child is slightly evil."

I rested my hand on her shoulder and locked my eyes to her before she could continue. "But obviously whatever is coming needed her to bring us together. Since that has happened we will be able to find out what is going on," I said.

"You think?"

"Yes. Whatever happens, we will take it on together."

For the next few weeks, I always tried to at least remind Shandra every day of the promise I made to her. At times the tone of her voice indicated she would be a bit annoyed, but regardless of how she felt I made sure to stick with my word. Somehow that managed to keep us both at peace no matter where we went.

At school word spread around about our weekend adventures, eventually spreading that we had also become lovers because of it. Idiots in the hallways would try to spread about how Shandra and I would share intimacy almost every night when in truth all we really did was kiss. We tried to hint at the truth but hardly anyone listened. Even our own friends would come together to gossip about every step Shandra and I took hand-in-hand. We couldn't even enjoy a good movie the night we scheduled to finally be alone without having at least one person squeal like a crazed fan.

For the movie, Shandra picked a science fiction romance flick titled, "Death Is Not The End." Little did she know at the time that I personally wrote the script for the movie. But once my name appeared in the credits, she took a new interest in my work, even offering up help where she could. She would even help out with minor tasks around the house, even though she never had to in the first place. She simply just wanted to do it for me because of how much I had done for her. But out of guilt I often helped her out with what

she was working on. I kept telling her, at first that she didn't have to do it. But she insisted so I let her do what she wanted. Somehow she was happy about it, which made me feel better when it was time for her to go back home. But if the time came, she was always welcome to return.

In the time this all was happening, I delivered the results of the ghost hunt to my grandfather while slowly working on building a relationship with Shandra. Our knowledge of own existence grew on a daily basis without a quarrel.

Times were pleasant, the Suits didn't come around to bug us and the world just seemed like a calmer place. In honor of our time together, Shandra became an official member of my team, which lead to a slight growth in cases for the next couple months. The following July, Shandra had approached me with a case that began to test the waters between us. It wasn't her fault, perhaps part of the blame was on me because of the way I acted.

This case involved utilizing abilities I had yet to master, and it crossed many boundaries. Don't get me wrong, I was happy that she was on the lookout for more work in order to help people. But this case forced things to change and little did I know, it would be the final stroke of the match needed to get the war started. It also leads to the biggest mistake I ever made over the course of my career.

Chapter 8

Saving the Old Flame

July 17, 2011

The day the town drank its own blood. I remember that day perhaps better than the rest of lead up to the war. It started out as a typical summer day as I worked in my office, occasionally stopping to answer a text message from Shandra. She had been talking with a friend going through a rough patch and was relaying small bits back to me so I could help. I tried offering up bits of advice to help the cause, but it came to a stop once I received a text message that read, “Please call me.” I pressed the Send button on my phone and waited. The phone rang three times before somebody finally answered.

“Hello,” answered Shandra.

“Hey, it's me. What's going on over there?” I asked.

“Listen, I think I got us a case. But I am not sure about what is happening.”

“Okay, just tell me what you know and we will go from there.”

“Alright,” she whispered, “A friend of mine has been looking for her sister who was kidnapped a couple weeks ago. Police have come up with nothing at all and are coming close to calling off the search.”

“That is not good. But it has nothing to do with what I do.”

“I know, I know. But look I was thinking we could do something to help out.”

“Shandra, if you're talking about using me to look into it, you have to remember there are things that can go terribly wrong in the process.”

“I know, but please, Dakota, we have to do something to help. I can't just hold back everything knowing that there is a way to help people when all else fails.”

“She is right you know,” whispered my Light Hunter. They were both right in their own ways. Something needed to be done and I had the resources to do it. Even though, everything I knew about the situation up to that point broke one of biggest rules about my vigilante actions. The rules to make my involvement seem like nothing more than a wrong place at the wrong time situation. My head dropped in disbelief of what I was about to say.

“Alright, I will see what I can do. But we all need to meet in person.”

"I kinda figured. We are in Lincoln Park, just across the street from the mall."

"Okay, I'll be there as soon as I can."

I locked my phone and nearly slammed it against my desk. Even though she didn't know it at the time Shandra had set me up for a huge failure. When dealing with someone going through a tough situation, usually ending up in death, it was too easy to read the situation wrong and risk an innocent life. People like myself who have psychic influences may receive more information from our surroundings than average people, but we are still prone to human error. If we are asked to find someone, we may misinterpret what information we receive and relay it back to the client. This would only ruin our credibility and could ruin a case. That is why a psychic trying to use their gift for profit, without finding a way to cover their ass, will only lead to the most humiliating situations if they are not careful.

I was not afraid to offer my psychic readings to the public, but I swore to stay away from the life-or-death stories the public could thrust upon me. Simply knowing the danger was enough to obscure the images I would receive, thus compromising the case. But in the memory of how dark the world seemed to become on a daily basis, I mustered enough tolerance of the inconvenience, so I could head out ready for the fight. When Shandra told me what the situation was I had a feeling it wasn't going to come to a peaceful end.

I rose from my office chair and stormed downstairs with my cell phone slowly sliding into my side pocket. There was a fight coming and I needed to be ready. My counterparts rose from the ground in concern of my coming actions. "What do you two want?" I asked them.

"It is probably for the best that you don't get frustrated at Shandra. She is only trying to help out a friend," answered my Light Hunter.

"I know. There is just too much at stake for this case."

"You are right. But there is still too much you don't know."

"And what is it that I don't know?"

"How about the fucking fact that the friend is Brianna?" interrupted my Shadow Hunter.

Brianna, that was a name I hadn't heard in a while. The frozen look on my face gave away my thoughts. "Yes, that Brianna. It was her sister that was taken. I checked up on the situation when Shandra started texting you, and I am afraid time is running short," said my Light Hunter.

"Then I guess we need to get going," I replied.

My counterparts fused themselves in order to join my body. I was going to need all of the powers at my disposal if I was going to find Brianna's sister. Hearing her name only angered me more but not because I was nearly being forced into helping her. It was because of the history between us.

Brianna was my ex-girlfriend from back in the eighth grade. The relationship started shortly after she broke up with a buddy of mine that was verbally abusive to her. Long story short, I came into give her a shoulder and somehow it translated that I wanted to date her. At first, I was blindsided but after some thought, I decided to go through with it just to see where it would lead. Her sister Jessica, who was about a year older than us, seemed more interested in the relationship than Brianna. She even was supportive when I decided to look into other venues to explore when Brianna tried to keep me by her side for “private” ventures. Inevitably, this leads to a huge breakup. I thought I could work things out so that Jessica and I could still hang out but Jessica thought it was best for her to be there for her sister.

I hadn't heard from either one since, except for an occasional wave when we happened to see each other in public. That was all we heard of each other for the longest time. Some days I did miss them, but life made sure to keep us apart as much as possible. Perhaps the separation and longing for a much simpler time were to bring me to that moment in time. A time when fate was brought by the very spirits of the past. Time-travel became a part of my story in many forms, this was one of them.

It becomes a part of everyone's rise when the unfinished business between the grace of times resurfaces. It is the time when hidden loves become apparent,

the unknown respects of leaders are revealed, and so much more started to bloom like black roses planted in graves. An image of death held a dark but beautiful truth of the world. The rose, the very flower of life itself, held many images in its color. The reds and whites show the secrets of affections. The blacks, which grow darker after every bloom, are said to show the images of death. But I prefer to think of it as something much deeper. The black rose shows how slow pain takes to be tucked away in the darkness, only to be seen when it mirrors the moonlight.

As I got into the car, the roads clear a path for what became a demon march. I did not care for traffic regulations as I sped towards the mall at 90 miles an hour. Everything came close to becoming a blurred mist engulfing the world. Nothing was able to stop me. Something about the potential of this case drove my animal nature. I could feel my teeth shifting and sharpening themselves into small knives as if I was a victim of lycanthropy, an ancient Greece medical term for human-animal transformation. The beast from inside was trying to tear through my skin. Something I tried to keep caged inside but didn't lock in case he was needed.

Once the mall came into view, my car slowed down to avoid missing the place I needed to be. Both Shandra and Brianna were shorter girls making them harder to spot. I came to a near stop and allowed my car to drift on nothing more than momentum so I could scan the

park. Every blade of grass, every leaf of each tree almost swayed in unison. They wanted me to see something. I found a parking spot about thirty feet from a duck pond. Three mallards swam in circles without a care of the world as I searched for perhaps the two most influential women in my life. The sound of the car boom nearly slamming singled the winds to send a ripple through the grass. It flowed through the grass like it was building a highway to my destination. My daughter materializes next to me and grabbed my hand.

"Daddy, you need to do this," she said.

"I know kiddo. Just do me a favor."

"What?"

"If it happens, please, don't watch."

"Daddy, don't worry. I already know what is going to happen."

"Does it have a happy ending?"

"No, it is very scary."

"But you aren't going to tell me anything to help out?"

"I can't. It is a rule I was given by the person that showed me how to come back."

"Fine. So do you know where your mother is?"

"Follow the wind."

Olivia's body broke apart into thousands of weightless pieces carried away by the growing winds. Each step I took scared the dancing grass blades, moving it forward through small hills and dips in the land. In

the distance, two large oak trees and a circle of rose bushes sheltered two masses of girl's clothing huddled together with just a bit of skin showing through gaps in their long flowing hair. Shades of black nearly blended them into the shadows. As I walked closer more details revealing the identities of the mass. Shandra and Brianna laid together, skin turned red from the boiling tears in their eyes. Faint demons swirled around them, taunting them with the dark truths. It was obvious I was walking into something with dark energy. A life was at risk, and inhabitants of a soul's Hell took advantage of the opportunity to bring the worse.

Standing just above the weeping souls, they were oblivious to my presence. So I kneeled just in front of them as the winds grew silent. The sunlight peered through the cracks of a rogue cloud, making it seem to only shine on me.

"Hello, Brianna. It has been a while," I whispered. The cries from both girls come to a still.

"Dakota. What... are you doing here?" asked Brianna through choked tears.

"Shandra told me I needed to come by to help you out."

"But what can you do?"

"A few things."

Shandra wiped just underneath eyes to clear up her tears. "Brianna," she whispered, "You need to let him help you. He can do things that no other person can."

"What does she mean, Dakota?"

I turned my attention towards Brianna as I stood on one knee, slowly bracing my arm against my leg. "Do you remember why we broke up?" I asked.

"You kept saying that you had all of these powers and I said you needed to be medicated."

"Let's just say I wasn't telling the whole truth and what I kept from you has gotten stronger."

"I don't care anymore. Can you find Jessica?"

"Stick out your hands and we'll see."

Brianna gently rose from Shandra's shoulder and exposed her hands outward. I grabbed her hand and focused my energy on what she knew. An electric shock started to build a vision in my mind's eye. Something about helping an old flame struck sparks as if from a blacksmith's anvil. It was an emergency override in case someone tried to hide crucial details. Brianna was not wanting to admit something was happening causing her mind to try hiding the truth from the outside. In time I start seeing the instance she found out about her sister. The image became clear and seemed to offer a peek through Brianna's own eyes.

The images I saw were clear as day. Every detail was as obvious as it was when it was noted in Brianna's mind, except with an absence of color. Everything in sight was black and white. She was just released from Canyon Falls High School, my school's rival, and was searching for her sister after they had finished with a day in summer school. Thinking that Jessica may have

been waiting outside near her car, Brianna proceeded to walk outside to the school parking lot.

Jessica had parked away from the campus to avoid crashing because of a negligent classmate. A smart move on her part. Brianna had left through a side entrance of the school. She looked around, silently noting her surroundings when her sister finally came into view. Jessica waved towards her sister showing where the ride home was hidden.

But as Jessica's hand fell to her side, a skinny man of average height in a black hood and jeans took a needle and put it into her neck injecting some kind of drug to make her weak. Brianna freaked out, dropping her stuff from school on the sidewalk as she ran to help her sister. Jessica was hauled and thrown into a large black van as it sped off. In the final moments of pure chance, Brianna sees and remembers the license plate and calls the police. The vision fades and my sight returned to the physical world.

"The license plate you saw was J-9-3-6-I-G-D, right?" I asked.

"How did you..."

"No time to explain," I interrupted, "Who is the officer that responded?"

"Jerome, why?"

I closed my eyes in disbelief. Jerome and I seemed to only cross paths when the living made stupid ass mistakes. It was likely this case didn't have supernatural involvement, but heavy storm clouds carrying every

ghost hunter's gift suggested that was about to change. The gift of lightning.

It is how souls move through worlds and was the power source for those of us who are gifted. I knew that if I showed up inside the police station to ask a few questions, I would be given the runaround so they could keep the chances of vigilante justice low. But this case was going nowhere and I had resources to trace how it all happened. It is often the last resort for cops to turn to psychic advisers but time was of the essence. I needed to go immediately.

"I think I might be able to pull some strings to get her back," I said.

"I don't care what you do, just get her back," cried Brianna.

"Will do."

As I started to walk back to my car I felt someone grab the back of my shirt. The sound of heavy breaths against my shirt and smell of salty waterfalls of tears made it obvious Something was bothering her as if she was connected to the case somehow.

"Dakota, please be careful," she pleaded.

"Shandra, don't worry. We already know that I make it out of this alive. Our daughter is enough proof."

"No, you don't understand. About two years ago a friend of mine was taken, almost exactly like the way Jessica was taken."

"What happened to her?"

Shandra's cries attempted to burst from her body. She tried her hardest to hold it back, but the dam walls built in her eyes slowly disintegrated.

"About a week later they found her body. Whoever... they..." she said as her words were clouded in tearful grunts.

It was impossible to understand what she was saying. Under the horror of what happened, Shandra collapsed to her knees. I hurried to catch her, allowing her to slide into my arms. She continued to cry in my arms, trying so hard to wrap her arms around me. "Please don't do this," she cried.

"I have to do this. There are still many things about me you don't know yet."

"Please, Dakota. It is too dangerous."

As I gently placed my hand on the back Shandra's head, I focused my energy on getting into her memories. She didn't want to talk about what happened, but she wanted me to know what had happened. There was a time she told me that I could get inside her head bugged her, but she acknowledged there would come times when I needed to dig. It was safe to bet that this fell into those guidelines.

I closed my eyes for just a moment. Because my relationship with Shandra was strong, I was able to receive visions in more detail than I could from almost any other source. With Brianna, I could only see things in black and white with no sound. This time every detail was in full color, and the sound was clear. In my

mind's eye, the vision started to play from Shandra's perspective.

She sat in a room at a police station, in a nearby town, next to her mother. An officer walks in with a yellow folder full of pictures and sits at the desk just in front of Shandra. Shandra focuses on the officer's face once he sat down. It was Officer Cortez. "Thank you two for coming," he said.

"No problem. We were told you have information about my daughter's friend?" asked Ramona.

"Yes, we had already informed Eliza's family. Because of something our guys in forensics found, we thought it would be best for Shandra to come in."

"What happened to her?" asked Shandra.

"She was murdered," answered Cortez, "Whoever took her cut her apart."

Shandra's head jerked downward in surprise of what happened. Her sunset red hair dropped around her head to cover the face full of tears. "That's horrible! Why would someone do that to her?" asked Ramona.

"If only I could say. But that is not the disturbing part."

The sound of a hand shuffling through papers in the folder taunted Shandra. A picture capturing the fate of someone she truly cared about sent shivers throughout her body. She tried to get her head to sit straight up but her mind grew too heavy. From the corner of her eye, she noticed Cortez hand over a picture of her mother. The corners of the page hanged just low enough for the

dark pools of red to become exposed. Shandra knew her friend was slaughtered like an animal. Her mother froze in shock at the sight of what was once a human being.

“Whoever did this is going to do it again. We don't know how they will pick future victims since this the first time something like this has emerged,” said Officer Cortez.

A couple peeps come from Shandra's mother. “So... you mean that this was a serial killer?” she asked.

“Not officially but we are looking at the possibility.”

“Can I see the picture?” asked Shandra.

Shandra mustered enough strength to lift her head. Her eyes were clouded with tears, and her voice was still trying to choke, but regardless of how she felt at the moment, she needed to see what had become of her friend.

“Are you sure about that honey?” asked Ramona.

Shandra nodded. Cortez signaled that it was alright, but from the look on his face, he was uneasy about how Shandra would react.

The smooth texture of the photo paper calmly rested itself in Shandra's hand. She uses her other hand to clear her eyes of tears that would distort and cloud the truth. But the second she rested the picture in her hand, she quickly wished she was completely blind. Not only had her friend been sliced apart, but whoever killed her got creative with the blood-soaked carcass. The body was cut apart at every joint and

something was burned into the skin. Across both arms and the chest, the killer left the message, "There will be more."

My vision of the incident froze in my mind's eye for some unknown reason. It gave me enough time to allow the mindset gifted by my buddies in the local forensics unit to set in. Patterns from my lessons started to piece themselves together, giving me insight into what had happened moments before the demise of the first known victim.

First off, the amount of blood that covered the floors and body indicated there were more victims. It was hard to tell from the picture but it had seemed every inch of the room was covered in blood, too much for even the largest of people. There were the lonesome drops about the size of quarters. The rather messy trajectory patterns showed the body was taken apart by a circular saw. One look at the ends of each body part back-ups that theory, also adding the blade was somewhat dull seeing how the flesh was torn apart. The last thing I noticed was bruising just around the victim's wrists and ankles. She held in place and constantly tried to free herself as if tortured. By the looks of the burned message, she was still alive when it was left in her skin.

When more tears came into Shandra's eyes, my vision faded away. My mind had returned just a few moments after Shandra fell into my arms. Something

about my stillness told her what I was doing. "You saw her, didn't you?" she moaned.

"Yeah. Now I get it," I answered.

"Just be careful okay. I don't want to lose you."

I pulled away from Shandra so I could look her in the eye. "I don't plan on dying today," I assured her. As she nodded her head in acknowledgment of the truth. I closed my eyes and kissed Shandra's forehead. I wasn't even sure if it would be my last, but I wanted it to remember it case it was. Now that I knew people had been killed by the very hands of the people that took Jessica, I needed to ready myself for the worst. This was my purpose in life after the Devil himself brought me back to life after the first time I died in this life, the purpose of my Shadow Hunter.

I stood up and mouthed the word, "goodbye" to the two members that affected my love life. Shandra was to head home with Brianna to bring about the safe return of her sister while I drove off to meet with Jerome down at the police station. Not a single breath was taken between the slam of my car door and the screams of my tires speeding away. I glanced in the rear view mirror just before the park leaves my sight to check on the girls. They had started to walk home together arm-in-arm. I was somewhat glad Shandra was there to cover the bases that I wasn't able. It was rather beautiful, to be honest.

Maybe it would come useful in future attempts involving police cases, but it wasn't time for Shandra to

try her hand. Cops can be a nuisance when it comes to the occult, mostly due to media frenzy, but after some convincing, they'll listen like dogs. As I drove, about five miles to the police station, I thought of ways to plow through the crowds. I sped past at least five police cruisers who thought I was already trying to plow through the city because of how fast I was going.

I watched from my rear view as the sirens flashed red, white, and blue on the unfortunate bystanders on the sidewalks. The police station sat on the left side of a four-lane road. Two lanes of traffic going the opposite direction blocked the entrance. Noting that it was my only chance to avoid getting rammed into by the cops behind me, I took a chance and jumped the curb once a tight opening was exposed. The cruisers drove too fast to be able to catch up when the next opening was exposed, thus driving at least five blocks away before finding an opportunity to turn around.

In my closing window of opportunity, I parked my car near an exit meant for garbage guys. Jumping out of the vehicle and beeping the doors shut, I hurried into the station to find Jerry. On the sidewalk, just outside the station grounds, I could see people on their cellphones ranting, "He just walked into the police station," and, "No, he doesn't have a weapon on him." They were right, I didn't have a weapon on me. It was the weapons inside me they should worry about.

Three officers were just walking outside through heavy glass doors with their hands on the holsters and

palms held out as if to hold me back. "Stop and put your hands above your head," shouted one of the officers. It was a nice try. The clouds above us grew and blackened the sky. With the veil, I took a chance and used my abilities to fly right over the three officers. Technically it isn't considered evasion of officers since I walked right into the police station on my own accord. The light murmurs that swirled behind me showed the job just confused the cops. If they tried anything I had a few ideas to keep them busy.

I yanked open the doors leading into the station, nearly tearing them off of the hinges. Considering the glass was supposed to be bullet-proof one would think that whoever built the damn place would put in hinges that supported large weight amounts. Several desks nearly carpeted the floors, with two cops stationed at each. One stepped out in front of me. "What the hell are you doing here?" he asked.

"I need to see Officer Jerome immediately, so I ask you ever so kindly to let him know that one of his CI's has arrived. And you should probably strap your holster before somebody who comes in for questioning gets a little jumpy," I answered.

"It's alright Detective, I have a feeling this is important. Otherwise, he wouldn't be here," said Jerry. The Detective returned to his desk but fixed his eyes on me. He was ready to kill me on the spot. "Please tell me you got something otherwise he will try to put a bullet in you," Jerry added.

"I may and what I may have may help with a call you responded to a couple days ago."

"You mean the girl that got taken earlier? What do know about her?"

An empty chair sat across from Jerry's desk that I borrowed to get a more comfortable position on the matter by sliding it just underneath me and taking a seat. "I happened to know this latest victim happened to be a very dear friend of mine and, her life may be coming to a bloody end," I answered.

"Jesus man, what the hell is it with you and the damsel in distress? First Shandra now Jessica?"

"Actually I was dating Jessica's sister, Brianna before I met Shandra. And because Shandra was a witness to another kidnapping, possibly tied to Jessica, she has been trying to console Brianna all day. Which leads me here! As for why women in trouble tend to come my way, I have been trying to figure that out for years now."

"Any luck?"

"Well... I have it reduced down to the day we met."

"You mean when..."

"Yes, something that you didn't find out was that the Devil himself saved my life."

Officer Jerome shuddered as the memories of the moment we became acquainted. "Shut up about it. Otherwise, you might lose your CI checks. Now I know you want something, now what is it?"

"A name, I know that. Whatever name was registered to the last vehicle spotted. I might be able to send my

probes out to find something if I know who to look for.”

“Why can't you just send them after the girl?”

“She is scared shitless which blocks me. I need to find someone who is either the reason or has been seeing it happen and is just not speaking.”

“Got it. As far as we know there is only one name. A Richard Simon was spotted at multiple abduction sights but no evidence was found to link him to the crimes.”

“So either he is an unfortunate bastard with horrible timing or a sneaky son of a bitch with a little too much to sneak.”

“Your second idea may be more correct. He was also spotted near other alleged sightings of the kidnapping victim moments before.”

“Got a picture of him on file?”

“Yeah, just give me a few minutes.”

Jerry adjusted the front of his chair towards a keyboard connected to an old desktop computer. The operating system was outdated by a few years, making the process drag on. I remember tapping against the arms of the chair knowing that any minute the cops I outran would storm in with guns drawn. Sure enough, six officers come in guns drawn. “Alright asshole, get your hands up now!” they screamed.

“Okay, if you say so,” I said. I jerked my arms in the position they wished. Clicks and cocks of every weapon made everyone jumps as every weapon in the

room flew upward and aimed themselves. The stubborn speedsters froze in their tracks after seeing their own guns yanked and shoved into their throats, ready to fire, by an unseen force. I couldn't be attached to a crime of threatening an officer if my hands weren't on the weapons. They couldn't do anything to stop me because, with every slight movement they made, a gun would mime the motion.

"Easy Dakota, they are just doing their job," whispered Jerry.

"As am I," I growled, "Did the damn system find anything yet?"

"Yes, Mr. Simon's address and his place of work. Now get out of here before shit gets out of hand!"

"Send everything to my phone and I will go check it out."

"Go!"

I rose from my seat and gently maneuvered through the frozen cops and floating guns. The wandering eyes of the frightened followed my movements until I was out the door.

"By the way, Cortez just left not too long ago to check up on a lead. Be careful if you two cross paths," shouted Jerry just before I left the station.

With a wave of my hand, I signaled to Jerry that I heard his warning and for the weapons to take out their ammunition and drop to the floor. I could hear everyone scrambling to collect their weapons and shouting

lines centered around the question, “What the fuck just happened?”

They were too disoriented by the confusion to notice anything else. A storm was allowing itself to prepare for what it held inside the clouds and they would not have a clue of its existence as long as they stayed indoors. This would play to my advantage as I read through the information Jerome sent me on my phone.

“Richard Simon, age thirty-five, about six foot tall, two-hundred-seventy pounds, married, two kids, lives in an apartment on the south side of town, works as one of the foremen for an old warehouse, and tends to work very long hours,” is what the text said followed by an image from Simon's driver's license.

When I saw his face another vision appeared in my head. It was partially blurry because the emotions of the target caused interference, yet the images stayed clear enough to see the truth. The man I was hunting was attacking another girl at that very moment. A young blonde was being stripped nude at knifepoint, struggling to get free. In the fight, the blade would slip into her skin spilling drips of blood all over. Simon took her by the hair and lead her to a wooden wall, just to strike her head hard enough to silence her cries. While wiping the sweat off his brow, he pounded against the wall to reveal a small crawlspace. Taking the unconscious girl by the arm, Simon crammed her body into space where it started to slide out of view.

Faint cries shrieked for help as the door to the crawl-space closed. Simon simply observed his clothes for any signs of what took place, and when none could be found, he simply adjusted his figure and returned to work.

My vision faded giving me no other details about the building or who all was trapped inside that old warehouse. But I knew that Simon was the one and he needed to be confronted about his actions. If the police got to him, he had a chance of getting away with the crimes. I couldn't let that happen. He needed to be taken care of by a force not bound to the laws. Many may interpret my actions as an act of fruitless vengeance and that it would not erase what happened. In truth maybe it was some form of vengeance that drove me, but it was not to erase the past, it was to keep it from happening again.

It was the only thought that ran through my mind as I got into my car and readied myself for the attack. I took a couple breaths to slow my heart rate. If I came in with a machine gun for a heartbeat, it would only burn me in the end. The best method was to approach this as a concerned friend of the victim. "Calm down dude," I said to myself, "Jessica needs you."

"Something you don't see," whispered a grandmother-like voice.

Thin, weak, and bony fingers graced the back of my head. Whoever possessed that voice was personally implanted something into my mind. It was another vision

inside the same warehouse of terrors. I had another glimpse of Simon sitting at a desk. He jumped at the sound of the door being jerked open. Officer Cortez emerged from the doorway and hurried over to Simon's side.

"My superiors are getting suspicious. They are sending in a raid team later. We need to move the bitches now!" he shrieked.

"Gabriel, you moron! You were supposed to keep them off of us!"

"Internal Affairs has been on my ass! They fucking started getting suspicious, so I came to warn you. They think I am off chasing a lead and if I don't report back soon they will know something is up."

"Would you relax? They haven't found anything that links us, have they?"

"No, but..."

"Relax. As long as they don't find the entrance to the cellar, we are fine."

"Fine. I'll head back to the station to get them off of our trails. But you seriously need to do something to get them quiet. Regardless of what I do they will send in a squad to search the area."

"I know. I already have something prepared to make sure no one makes a peep."

Simon reached to a drawer on his desk and opens it, revealing several cans of what appeared to be air freshener. Before I could see anymore details the vision faded. The person who induced it felt I seen enough to

understand the situation. There was a police cover-up, I couldn't tell for how long, but Cortez was a significant player. It didn't matter that a cop was in on it, not at all. Cops like to stick together, which is an honorable trait, but mixed with ignorance and corruption it would lead to genocide. There are good cops, there are good soldiers but with numbers comes corruption. The very forces designed to protect the public become the very enemy. This is where people like me come in. We come in when nothing is done to clean a mess and scare the shit out of everyone.

Modern culture has become so centered around figures of the media. When the world reaches the next war all it will take to distract the masses would be to simply dangle a random celebrity scandal in front of them so the foolish will go on like nothing is happening and those aware are too ridiculed to speak out. Becoming the very celebrity was the only way to turn the tables and smash the problem through them.

'Perhaps I should get a few more eyes on the streets,' I thought to myself. With my cell phone, I dialed the number to a nearby news station to let them in on this secret.

"Hello, this is Maggie with KSAR news channel thirteen," answered a woman.

"I have some information that gets your moron station a decent story," I said making my voice sound deeper.

"Sir, if you have information you can send it in on our website."

"No time. I have information on the strings of kidnapped girls turning up dead."

On the other end of the line, I could hear the sound of Maggie desperately trying to find a pen and a pad of paper. Apparently, they have been looking for information so they would be able to lead the story but came up short. "Please go on," she requested.

"A person of interest has been stopped at the old warehouse on the corner of Smith and Elizabeth, many of the girls who have gone missing have been reported to be spotted in this area. Many who were tied up with bags over their heads. Rumor is that the person of interest is the one taking these girls. In a few minutes, a man is going to go in and tear apart the entire building if he manages to find any trace of the missing girls. Also if something does get found it will be likely police activity in the area will increase and there will be a heavy loss of life. Give it about half an hour before bullets fly."

Before she could respond I hung up the phone. It would cause them to scramble to find out more information. Even if they ignored the tip they will be soon to crawl all over the crime scene. This needed to get as sloppy as I could get it. I started the car and let the engine roar like the Hounds of Hell. The old warehouse was two miles away from the police station. It

is ironic about how missing person's cases became resolved within a few miles from where they disappeared.

The buildings were not very tall in this part of town making it easier to see the warehouse. An old steel building came into view, one that looks so weak and run down a child's toy hammer could take it apart. I needed to be careful otherwise I could cause the building to collapse over the only exits for the girls still alive to get out. I took note of everything as I drove through the streets. People on the streets completely oblivious to what was about to happen. But the dogs and birds acted like they suspected something. They wailed and howled and screeched as if Death himself had come.

I found an entrance to the warehouse that was away from the public eye near a couple dumpsters. Countless cats were digging through the trash as if they were starved and smelt something pleasing. For all, I knew those cats were been dining on the rotten, soupy flesh of previous victims. I didn't want to look, so I based my assumptions solely on the smell alone. Keeping the focus on finding Robert Simon was the only thing that kept me conscious. Pulling up near the entrance, I paused for a moment.

"I can't believe I am about to do this," I said to myself. All my life I had imagined situations where I would come out the hero. All my life I would dream about slicing apart some bad guy just enough to make them fit inside a small Tupperware bowl. I was finally going to do fulfill that dream. The idea of taking a life held

me back, but something about the idea of saving a life would ease the guilt.

Knowing that this was a high-risk operation, I did everything in my power to keep quiet. As I crawled out of my car, I made sure to gently shut and lock it. I didn't know who all was inside. Cortez being here was enough trouble. I needed to allow my Shadow Hunter to take over my body. He knew how to stalk these types of people. But he was paired with my Light Hunter in order to find information on the situation. As his image appeared in my head, two spots appeared on the ground. One giving off bright white light. One giving off dark energies. Both began to shrink as my counterparts rose from them.

"What took you guys so long?" I asked them.

"We were counting the bodies down in the sick bastard's personal dungeons," answered my shadow ego, "At least twenty dead and one alive."

"And yes Jessica is amongst the living, but seeing her condition she may die in the next twenty-four hours if we don't move in," added my Light Hunter.

"Alright, I have an idea. I need you, Shadow, to help me sneak in without anyone noticing. I could do it by myself but with you, I have a thicker cloak to work with. Light, once we are in I am going to need your help to help keep me from killing him. I want to present myself as nothing more than a concerned friend for the first few moments. But when the time comes and I find Jessica, I also need you guys to help heal her wounds if

they are too severe. As for me, I will get what I need out of him then make sure he doesn't do it ever again."

Both of my counterparts shook their heads to signal an agreement before allowing themselves to mold into my body. I felt the shift in power as my Shadow Hunter leaped into the controls and lead the way. I remember sneaking through the back door and constantly scanning for any potential threats. I came to a large metal door with a thick glass window. Through it, I could see perhaps five men monitoring conveyor belts carrying various merchandise to ship out to stores across the country. The noise alone from a typical workday made it an ideal hiding place for a torture chamber.

The door was guarded by a keypad. I didn't have a way of busting it open without getting myself too much attention. In the moment I could think of only think one option to get in. If I could cause the keypad to sound off an alarm, at least one would go check it out thinking maybe it is an animal or a child playing with it. They would not have any suspicion of it because no one has ever tried to get in and their boss would try to make sure no one saw the girls. I knew that the key codes often contained four digits. So I pressed different combinations each adding up to the number twenty-one, the ultimate combination for blackjack. All that is meant to be in life is a true gamble after all. Society tries to play by the odds that grow the best in their favor but are also tricked into thinking those odds

do not shift. This was a case that stirred in favor of the odds less traveled.

First, try, a buzzer sounded off. Second and third tries sounded off the same. The fourth finally sounds an alarm in their security system. I could hear light footsteps coming from inside coming to inspect my actions. The door came open and a male figure peered his head to observe the scenery. I was lying just underneath the side of the steps leading to that door. When the door opened, the alarm continued to sound. It had to be shut off by the correct combination.

I lifted myself up to where I was able to see the combination lock so I could note the combination. My heart began to race knowing I was so close to my purpose. Perhaps it was the adrenaline coursing through my veins that helped me remember the combination. Two. Seven. Four. Eight. Somehow I was right that the numbers added up to twenty-one. Funny how instinct can lead to the right choices. But given that there was a countless inventory of possible combinations, it was difficult for even those who built the machines to get an accurate guess without tearing the unit apart.

Once the man tucked himself back inside the building after resetting the alarm, I got up and positioned myself to where lights would have a hard time spotting me. I typed in the combination I spotted and earned a sense of relief when the gears inside the system became loose. I went inside and slowly closed the door behind me so no one would notice. Even if the boss

was a total asshole people tend to get a little on edge if you knock around the person that sign's their weekly paychecks.

Money has become the second form of blood in so-called advanced countries. But if a creature were to adapt to this shade of blood, it quickly becomes poisoned. Perhaps that is why people with not so much in their life always seemed to be the happiest.

My Shadow Hunter helped adjust my eyes to low-light conditions. During the night-shift lights were placed to simply help keep an eye on the machines. Everything else depended on the eyes making the adjustment. It made for dangerous conditions but it was all they had. I was pretty sure several workplace violations existed in this very building, turning things to my advantage.

A shimmer of light revealed the bottom of a metal staircase leading to a catwalk. The difference in shadows indicated some sort of room was upstairs. It was the office. I made a beeline for the stairs, making gentle steps so no one would hear me. My weight alone upset the weak stairs, but somehow I made it sound like the moans of an old building. Suddenly I found the door leading to that room. I graced my hand against the door to find some sort of nameplate. I felt some smooth edges towards top of the door that felt a bit denser than the rest. I allowed my hands to relax a bit so I could get an idea of what I was sensing. From what I could tell it was a metal slate about two inches high

stood just at my eye level. My index finger brushed against the surface so I could read the engraving. "Richard Simon, Head of Production," read the name-plate.

I was about to bust right through the door before I was stopped by my Light Hunter. "Remember, you need to act calm. He can't know that we are onto him," he reminded me.

I shook my head acknowledging the truth. Simon could not know that I was aware of his activities. So with slices of disappointments, I knocked on the door.

"Please come in," he shouted.

I opened the door and walked into his office. "Mr. Simon I was wondering if I could speak with you about the missing girls the police have questioned about," I said.

"Please shut the door and have a seat," he said, acting as if nothing was going on.

As he wished I shut the door and took a seat at his desk that stood about four feet away from the door. His office seemed to live to expectations of a facility like this. Family photos standing in wooden frames gave company to cluttered papers and a desktop computer. Not much decorated his walls except for a few more photos showing his wife and kids and a calendar. Old sets of blinds covered windows that looked over the work area on the lower floor. Kind of a boring place if you ask me.

"So before we get into this, what is your name son? And if I may, why the hell do you want to know about those girls?" he asked me.

"My name is Dakota Frandsen and one of the latest girls taken happened to be a dear friend of mine."

"Oh really? I guess she is lucky to have someone who worries about her."

"Yeah, yeah. Now listen, I was informed that you had been spotted at multiple abduction sites, so I know you must have noticed something."

"Are you sure that I was the one that saw those girls?"

From under the desk, I could hear the click of the hammer on a revolver. Somehow this guy was onto me. "Not yet," whispered my Light Hunter in my mind.

"I was informed that you have been questioned and you have provided the police with a few details. I just want to know if you can provide me with any information that you couldn't tell the police for whatever reason."

Another pistol click came from just underneath the desk. Simon was clearly not going to be willing to even try to divert me away. He was getting ready to put a bullet in my head. "You know, you shouldn't get involved with these matters and let the police clean up the mess," he grinned.

"Get him!" growled my Shadow Hunter.

I placed my foot on the edge of the desk and kicked. The commotion caused Simon to accidentally fire the

weapon into the ground before dropping it. An opening under the desk made the weapon easy for me to grab as I flipped over the desk. Simon screamed in agony, hoping that one of his employees would come to his rescue. I couldn't let that happen so I dragged a filing cabinet over to block the door. The echo of footsteps stampeding a metal staircase filled the air just outside the office. But it didn't matter. I had at least two minutes before somebody worked through the adrenaline in order to find a way to bust in here. With the revolver still in my hand, I opened it to check how much ammo was inside. Five bullets remained with the number thirty-five etched into the backs of the casings. This was going to hurt, a lot.

I closed the revolver then checked out the damage done to Simon as he was banging his head against his desk that sat upon the backs of his hands. I was unsure why he didn't use his hands to move the desk until I noticed his fingers turned a dark purple. The poor bastard now had broken hands. Seeing how he liked to throw around his victims I felt it was an appropriate punishment to return the favor. But there was more to come. I hurried back over and pulled down his desk to its intended position. Richard was now sobbing as he stared at his throbbing hands now deformed from the busted bones.

"You son of a bitch, I'm going to fucking kill you!" he cried.

"Shut the hell up," I told him. His body swayed back and forth as if to summon a healer, screaming in pain. I pulled back the hammer on the revolver and aimed towards his shoulder. Bang. The bullet tore through both skin and bone as it flew. Bang. Chunks of his skin on his other shoulder flew off as if torn by a hungry animal. Bang. His left kneecap became plastered in blood against the floor. Bang. A bloody trickle emerged from his right hip. I saved the last bullet by tucking the revolver inside my jean pocket.

"Oh Lord, please save me!" he cried.

I ran behind his desk and punched him in the face. "I said shut up!" I yelled, "I know you took those girls. I know how you beat the shit out of them when they wouldn't give in. I know how you like to take off their clothes once they are unconscious. I know that once you are done you slice them up into little pieces!"

"How?"

"Because the Devil sent me!"

Suddenly the look in his eyes changed from tortured soul to fear of his fate. Apparently, he was a religious man who felt the eyes of God protected him so he could do whatever he wished without consequence. I didn't care much for religion. I didn't care what religion people followed. But the moment they abuse the right to religion as an excuse to commit a crime was the point I drew the line. It was why countless troops are overseas and becoming damaged to the point when

they get home they become just like the guys they fought.

"I did this in God's name, you cannot kill me!" screamed Simon.

"We shall see," I laughed.

I noticed an indent in the wall close to the floor that resembled what I had seen in my vision from earlier. Time was running out as indicated by the bangs and bounces against the window and door leading into the office. Simon's employees heard everything and felt compelled to save their boss. I needed to get out of there but the only exit was blocked. I needed to escape through the hidden door. I grabbed Richard by the hair and dragged his weak body out of the office chair. The blood from his wounds formed a trail on the carpet floor as I took him over to the entrance of the chute he used to hide the bodies of his victims.

"I believe this is where you take them," I grunted.

"Please don't do this," he cried, "I don't want to see them."

"It is too late to beg. The demons you created are waiting."

I kicked just above the indent in the wall to open the passage and threw him inside. His body banged itself against the sides while painting a path with the blood from his wounds. The metal surface wobbled and shook with every bounce until a loud snap silenced it all. Richard's body was now weak to the point any

wrong movement would snap his bones in four. Exactly how I wanted him.

I sat on the floor and readied myself for the trip down. I grabbed the sides of the chute so I could launch myself into it, only to be rushed by shouting workers and shattering glass. I did not want them to see what I had done to their boss, for they would have attempted to kill me before I had the chance to save Jessica. So I took the revolver out of my pocket and slid down the chute with the weapon in hand. The chute grew darker and darker as the entrance to it closed above me. It was a straight ride down that became halted by a loud crunch. It was Richard's spine breaking under my feet. He screamed in agony as I twisted my feet around on his back. I stepped to the side, allowing him relief from adding onto his misery.

"Jessica, are you in here?" I asked, "Jessica?!"

Hoping for a response I scanned the darkness, only lit by dim fluorescent bulbs in the ceiling. noting something was moving in a single spot in the far corner. It was a person curled over another body. A light came on as I tried to move closer revealing the horrifying truth. The blood of dozens coated the walls and floors accompanied by several fresh bodies. Some had yet to be dismembered. My head started to rush. I started to lose my footing but as I caught myself I found one girl who was still alive.

"Jessica, is that you?" I asked.

She was hunched over the blonde I saw in my last vision, positioning her body as if she was laid in a casket with the remainder of her clothing stretched over her. At the sound of my voice, Jessica jumped, thinking I was her attacker coming to finish the job.

"Hey, it's me. Dakota. I have come to get you out of here," I told her.

"Dakota?" she whined.

I watched as she turned to face me, covered from head to toe in what was left of those also taken. Her clothes barely held together. I couldn't tell if she was wounded in any way but the way she moved showed damage much deeper. It was going to be hard to heal her if it was possible at all. What had happened to her took something away she may never get back. Even if she were able to move on, she would never be the same.

"It's over. I am taking you home now," I assured her.

Her jaw dropped. She couldn't believe that I was the one to come for her in her time of need, which became more apparent with each gentle step she could. In the space between us, there were at least six bodies she stepped over and around to get to my side. Her blood-soaked hands reached out to me. Her fingers pressed against my chest to see if I was real, to see if I was actually there with her. To let her know that this was all real I tucked away the pistol and grabbed her hands and drew two hearts with my thumbs against the backs, one for each hand.

"Why did you come for me?" she asked.

"Do you remember the promise I made to your sister we broke up? That no matter what happens between us I would always be there for her?"

"Yeah?"

"I meant it for you as well."

Not a second passed before I found myself with Jessica wrapped around me. Her heart raced in joy, she was going to get out of Hell's waiting room. Our serene reunion was cut short by heavy breathing and the growls of hungry animals.

"They have come for me," Simon shouted, "They will take you too."

"No, they are only here for you," I growled.

"Please make him go away," Jessica whispered.

I aimed Simon's revolver and pulled back the hammer in order to prepare the next bullet. Killing him was the ultimate goal. The goal to make sure he could not harm anyone ever again. Not for vengeance, but as punishment for his actions and to place fear into others that plan on similar endeavors. The corrupt tend to get nasty when they aren't frightened by those who watch them. Very few had the courage to fight back because our country focuses on who fired the last shot instead of making all who battled take on the responsibility. Perhaps it was because of my own battles that I felt responsible for helping people in these situations.

Something about the gunshot seemed to startle the ceiling while settling the beasts around us. Jessica and I looked toward the ceiling as the metal structure

shouted stampedes have come. My Shadow Hunter greeted us to bring the status of the topside operation.

"The cops are here and they are packing," he whispered. Jessica acted as if she couldn't hear him.

"Jessica, the police are here," I told her.

"But how will they find us?" she asked.

"We are going to need to scream up the chute. Do you know where the second entrance is?"

"Yeah, but it's hard to find. Somehow it is hidden in the walls. I never got a chance to see it."

"It's alright, we will think of something."

We stopped to listen into the commotion above us. It sounded like a fight broke out amongst the workers and police. Jessica and I walked over to the bottom of the chute screaming to the tops of our lungs. With frustration at the lack of results, I threw the empty weapon into the chute, hoping I would throw just hard enough to open it.

"Let me try," whispered my Light Hunter.

A large ball of white light emerged from my body and fired itself up the chute. The energy somehow made the lights in the ceiling grow brighter. Jessica's voice grew quiet at the sight of what was happening. She has never seen me like this, in the heat of battle. I looked over to see her face frozen.

"Relax, it will get us out of here," I assured her. Before she could speak the seal opened at the top of the chute, igniting more motivation to shout for help.

A cop turned on his flashlight and peeked inside the chute. A helmet and mask covered most of his face, indicating he was a member of the local SWAT team. When he finally saw us, he removed his mask that covered his mouth so we could understand.

“Are you guys okay down there?” he asked.

“We're fine. But there are dozens of bodies down here. Most of them look like some of the girls that have been reported missing!” I answered.

“What are your names?”

Jessica gains enough strength to speak. “My name is Jessica Summers and this is my friend Dakota Frandsen,” she says while moving her hands to gesture our identities.

“How are you guys the only ones alive?”

“We will explain later. There is another way out of here but we can't find the door. Any of you have a lighter or two and some paper we could use?” I shouted.

“Hold on a second.”

Upstairs all of the cops scattered to find the materials I had asked for. If there was a hidden door here, having smoke around could help find an exit. I looked around to find any lack of consistencies in the wall that would give me an idea where to look.

“Coming down,” shouted another officer. Shreds of paper glided down the chute as if directed by the quickly falling lighters that tapped against the floor.

We both picked a lighter and grabbed a few sheets of paper.

"Thank you!" shouted Jessica.

"Be careful you two. We will try to get the blueprints to this place while you smoke for the exit."

Needing no further words Jessica and I lit the corner of individual pieces of paper and gently walked along the walls. The smoke would help make it easier to spot where the air seemingly passed straight through the walls. Small splashes filled the space underneath our feet with each step we took. It was hard to avoid all of the bodies.

But we hoped the spirits of those who fell here would forgive us, knowing that justice would come to them even in death. The fires would quickly try to reach our fingers. If that were to happen we simply blew them out and lit another sheet. The smoke danced and twirled off of the flames as if to grace the sky. Something in my chest gave me the feeling that I was getting closer to the answer. My suspicions were confirmed when the smoke spun through a very thin crack in the wall. I knocked on the wall so I could test the theory. Toward the left of the crack, hardly any outside noise could be heard. Toward the right, an echo was heard. I found the exit.

"Jessica I found it!" I shouted. She blew out her burning sheet and hurried to my side to confirm the news. We were so much closer to freedom. "Go let them know," I said.

"No problem," she replied. She walked back over to the bottom of the chute and began shouting, "We found it!" The voice of the officer seemed to stutter from my position but by Jessica's body language she could hear them loud and clear. I watched as she pointed in my direction. More chatter is heard from other officers that responded to the scene, still difficult to understand.

"Step back they are on their way," she told me.

I followed her suggestion and took three steps back. We could hear the officers storming out of the room upstairs and throughout the building. For a minute we could not hear anything from the outside world. Our worries started to grow. What if something happened to them?

We eased our worries once we saw the officers break through the hidden doorway. Before they spoke to us, they observed the bodies that lay all around us. Some even appeared to have almost vomited in their own suits.

"What the hell happened here?" one asked.

"Hell is what happened," answered Jessica.

"I can tell," he said. The leader of the group turns back to his colleagues and said, "Let's get these two out of here."

They lead us out of the room and onto the street. Apparently, the room where all of the girls were hidden was underground and could only be reached by a cellar door. It had seemed every working person in civil ser-

vices was waiting outside freshly laid police tape. When we emerged the eyes of everyone nearly escaped their heads at the sight of us. All they could see was two people drenched in blood with hardly a mark on them. A news van drove into view just across the street. Two people jumped out, one with a large camera hoisted upon his shoulders and hurried towards us. For some reason, in a city that was only twelve square miles large, the local newsgroup believed they worked in a major city. If given the chance, they would not have a problem showing the decaying bodies of children on the six o'clock news. They have tried to do it in the past with fallen officers, which nearly earned themselves a body riddled with bullets. One of the SWAT guys noticed how the reporter mostly focused on the entrance to the torture room and readied his assault rifle. Perhaps he knew one of the missing girls.

Jerry stood right next to one of the ambulances parked just outside the tape. Jessica was taken inside to be examined by the paramedics when he stopped me in my tracks by placing his hand on my shoulder. "Let me guess, Richard Simon is dead," he joked.

"Yep," I answered.

"You torture him?"

"Yep."

"He made the first move?"

"Yep."

He took a deep breath as if he knew the answer to the next question. "So how bad is it in there?" he asked.

"Blood is everywhere. It is hard to count how many bodies are in there for how bad some of them are cut up."

His eyes adjusted to the direction I came from. Something about what he saw disturbed him. I turned to see what was catching his attention. The forensics unit had arrived and started in on the investigation. "Alright, you need to get out of here. I will take care of them," he whispered.

"Dude, my car is on the other side of the building," I told him.

"Just be careful. A case this nasty is likely to attract the Feds."

I hated having to leave, but Jerry was right. The high intensity of this case would easily attract federal investigators and our shadow net for catching bad guys would be exposed. I shut my eyes and nodded in agreement.

"But before you go, did you happen to see Cortez?" he asked.

It dawned on me. Where in the hell was Cortez? I saw him in my vision but when I made it inside the building I didn't see him anywhere. "He fled before I got here," I told him.

"You mean he..."

"Yeah, he helped cover this up."

I walked over to Jessica's side to check on her. One of the paramedics was shining a flashlight into her eyes to check for a concussion. Her pupils responded nor-

mally, and given the circumstances, it was definitely a miracle. She was always a bit hard-headed, yet when it sometimes became annoying, it was what saved her.

"How are you doing?" I asked her.

"Good, thanks to you," she giggled.

"You're welcome. I need to get out of here but I will check on you later 'kay?"

"Dakota wait!"

As I was just about to leave I was halted by Jessica's grasp. She had leaped from the back of the ambulance, wrapped her arms around me and rested her head against my shoulder. Her legs dangled almost two feet off the ground as I wrapped my arms around her. I remember a bright flash of light engulfing us. Somebody took our picture, perhaps as a symbol of hope. I felt her chin moving against the gap in my collar bone. "You know, there will come a day when you will make some girl very happy," she whispered.

To the best of my knowledge, she didn't know about Shandra at the time. But I couldn't help but make a subtle reference. "I think I already found her," I whispered back.

"Good. I hope it turns out for the best."

"And I hope that you find happiness as well."

She let out a slight moan before dropping from around my neck. Without any further words, we parted ways. She stayed close to Jerry while I tried sneaking over to my car. I could feel her eyes watching me as I walked away that stayed until I turned to a corner not

covered by the public eye. A lone alleyway with nothing more than my car and a dumpster appeared before me. I pulled out my keys from my pocket. But a sharp needle spitting a drug into my system and a bag over my head nearly rendered me unconscious.

